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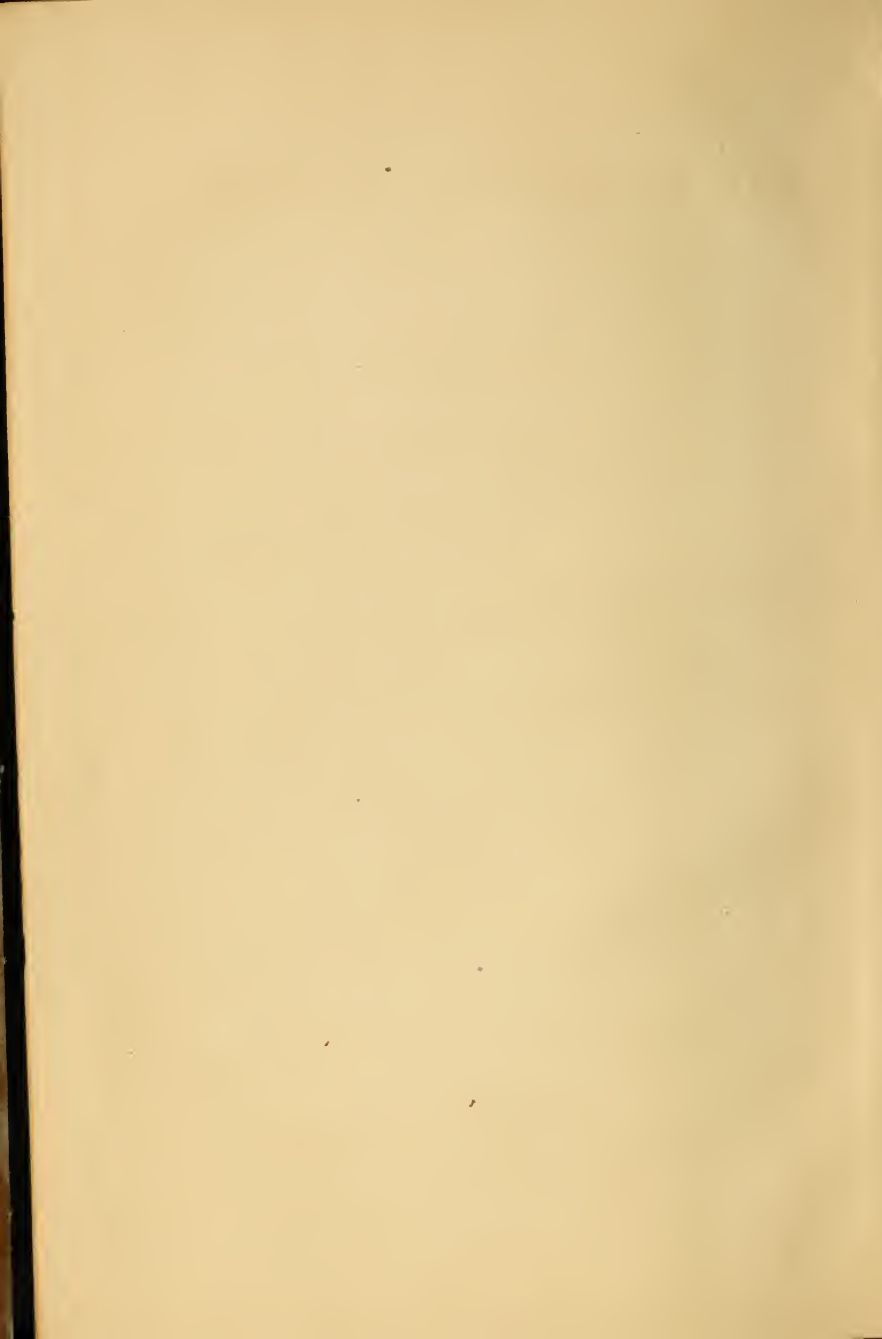
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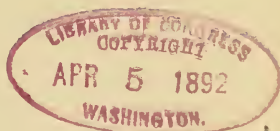




# HOURS WITH A SCEPTIC.

✓ BY

D. W. FAUNCE, D. D.



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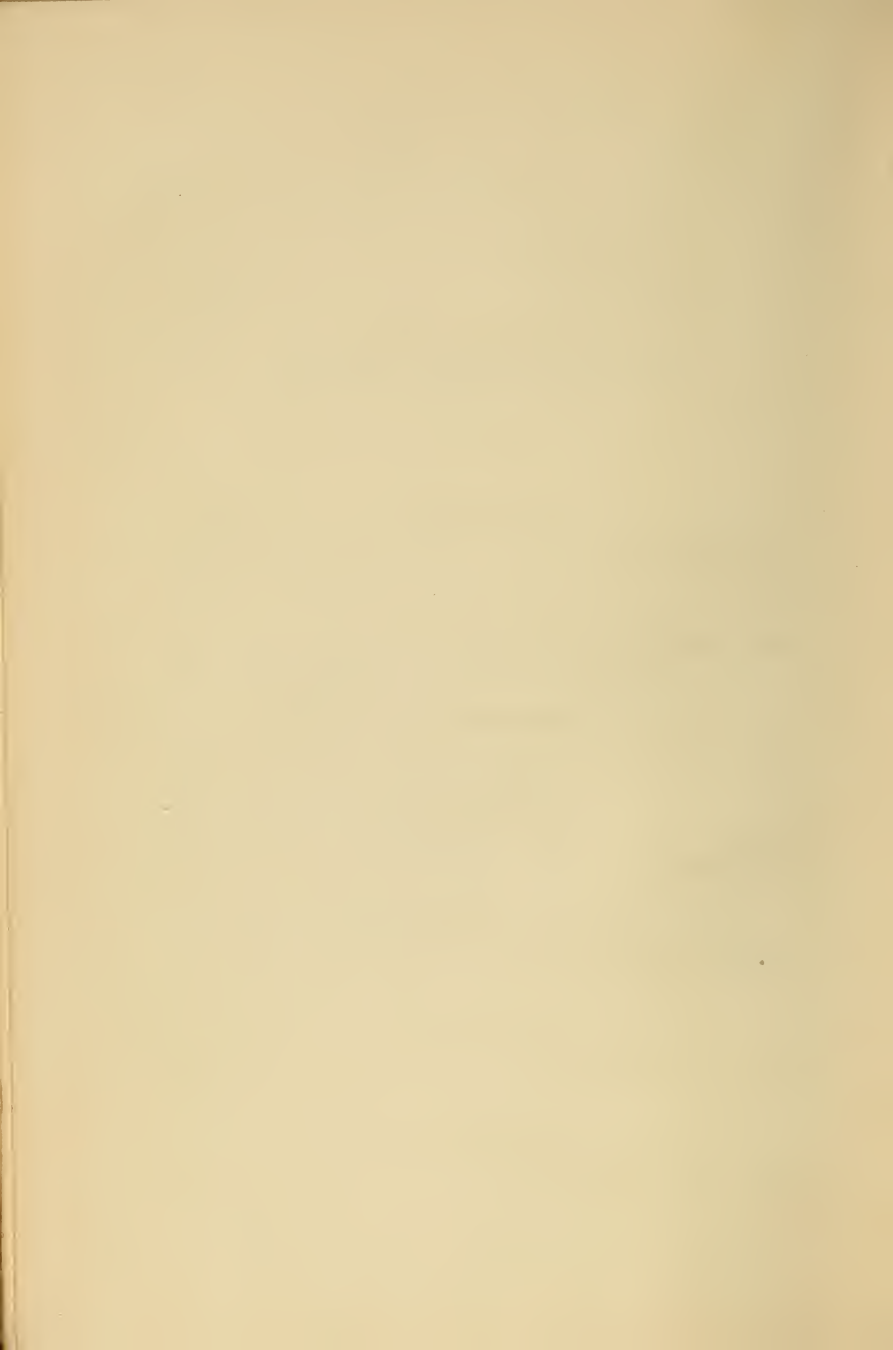
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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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THESE are not altogether "imaginary conversations;" nor on the other hand are they verbatim reports. Enough that there is a general basis of fact. In addition to what memory, aided by notes made at the time, enables the writer to recall, he has felt entirely free to enlarge the argument from his subsequent study and thought. While the actual order of the topics has been presented as far as possible, and sometimes the words employed have been retained, the aim has been also to meet the freshest objections with appropriate replies.

The book is prepared in the hope that God will use it for guiding some struggling soul through perplexity into faith.



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# HOURS WITH A SCEPTIC.

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## CHAPTER I.

### AN INTRODUCTION.

“WILL you call at once at the residence of Mr. B—— and act as a witness to his signature of his will?”

Such was the message that came to me one bright summer morning as I sat at work in my study.

“Certainly,” was the instant reply. “But is Mr. B—— seriously ill?”

“Yes; and yet, such is the nature of his sickness that, while he may linger for months, he may die at any moment; and his physician has suggested that he should settle his affairs as speedily as possible. He is a good deal agitated this morning, for his physician and his lawyer are both with him, and they are awaiting my return with you.”

Mr. B—— was a neighbor who, for some years, had passed my house daily on his way to the Public Library, where he spent most of his time. He was a trustee of that library, and one of its purchasing committee, and was supposed to know, in a general way, something of every new book placed on its shelves. He had the reputation of being a great reader in a very wide range of

literature. A gentleman of leisure, with an ample fortune earned years before, his whole time, since his retirement from business, had been spent among books. He was not ready as a conversationist. Indeed, he was, the rather, taciturn. But his remarks on any subject were of a kind which showed an acquaintance with the best authorities. We had served together on a public Board; but his somewhat shy manners had hindered any especial intimacy. He had the reputation of being an infidel. But from certain remarks, on one occasion, I was convinced that he was a believer, in some loose sense, at least, in the being of God and in some sort of an immortality for the race if not for the individual soul. I had sought several times to engage him in conversation on religious subjects. But he instantly became silent; and I had reason to think that he was unwilling to converse with me on the matter. He had showed such a studied avoidance of me as a minister of religion, that I was a good deal surprised at his request for me to act as a witness to the signature of his will.

I found Mr. B—— in his library, sitting in an easy chair, propped up with pillows, his legs covered with an afghan. He extended his hand, and said, instantly, pointing to the document on the table, “You know it is well to be prepared for the inevitable.”

The signature was quickly affixed, and I, expressing to him my sorrow for his sickness, begged leave to call again in a few days. To this request he made no reply, and I took my leave. Early the next morning I received a note, asking me to call at his house. I found him more composed than on the day before, and he instantly began

a somewhat hesitating apology for what he called his rudeness in not replying to my suggestion of another call. He had been extremely depressed, he said, and was greatly wearied. The prospect before him was that for many months he would be confined to his room, and it was only a spasm of irritability due to his disease that had caused failure to invite any of the friends who were with him the day before to call again. He asked after the news of the day, the gossip of the town and the articles in the magazines of the month. He inquired what new books I was reading, and spoke of some he was just finishing. Twice I brought the conversation into the realm of religion, when he swiftly and abruptly changed the topic. It seemed to me that he wished to show me that he would like literary calls on my part, so that he might be cheered and diverted in the sickness before him. Rising to take my leave, I ventured a few direct religious words. I reminded him that yesterday he had made a business preparation for what he had called "the inevitable," and suggested that he and I, as moral beings, were some time to go on an inevitable journey to another world, and that it became us to make moral preparations therefor. A look of displeasure instantly crossed his face. He turned aside his head, and was absolutely silent. I added that I did not wish to intrude with an unwelcome subject; that I did not speak to him in my capacity of minister of religion, since he had not sent for me to obtain spiritual counsel; but that, as a man speaking to a brother man, I could not do otherwise than express my religious concern for him. I begged pardon if I had offended him by my earnest words of interest in his wel-

fare. He turned toward me, extended his hand and simply said: "I would much like to have you call again very soon."

Another note from Mr. B——:

"DEAR SIR: I have been thinking over your apology for speaking to me on a matter which I showed very clearly was an unwelcome one. At first I was inclined to blame you; for, if religion be true, and I need it, as you think, then there should be no apology offered for it. But as I think more of our interview, I do not know that I am right. I rather think you did not apologize for religion, but for urging it upon one who seemed to regard the subject as unwelcome. Perhaps I may be more ready to hear about it than you think. Only do not put me down as an 'inquirer' in your technical meaning of that word. In the intellectual meaning of the word I admit I have been an 'inquirer' for years, and have done a good deal of reading on that subject. And I should like to talk with you about it—on its intellectual side. I have a great number of objections; and, if it will not shock you too much, I should like to state them to you. Please call if you can on Wednesday morning, at ten o'clock."

With this note in hand, another call on Mr. B—— was made upon the day he had named. He was seated as before. There was a pained look on his face, but he assured me that he was not suffering acutely at that time. Producing the note, I said at once:

"Let us understand one another, and then we shall talk on this matter of religion definitely and with a clear aim."

He said: "Yes, we should know on what we are agreed. But it was my idea," he continued, "that you would allow me to state my objections and that then you would answer them. It is true I have a good many of them, and they are not in my mind in any definite order. But one will suggest

another as we proceed. My reading on this matter has been larger than you suspect. I have had unusual opportunities to study the literature of this subject, and it is not boasting to say that I have a fair acquaintance with the theories of the European schools of religious thought. I am very unorthodox, denying about everything that the usual Christian creeds affirm. I feel as though I had a kind of natural repugnance to each one of the many human religions. I have objections to them all. And yet I want to know them, so as to see what men have believed. It seems to me nothing is too ridiculous to have been believed by somebody, and that it is the part of a wise man to distrust everything on the subject except a very few fundamental beliefs."

He had said all these things in single sentences, pausing after each ; partly, as I thought, because of his usual hesitancy of speech, and partly, as I feared, because he was exhausted by the effort. I had not interrupted him at any point. After allowing him a moment more of silence, I said :

" You wish, then, to be a kind of free lance in these interviews which you propose ; you to attack anything you choose, and I to defend where I can. You want to have free range over all the great religions of the world, and desire me to follow you. But I can see no profit in such excursions. Nor has either of us the time. If we are to go through all the great religions of the world, examine all the arguments for them and listen to all the objections, we have work enough laid out for the next hundred years."

He interrupted me instantly with the remark :

"I grant that. But how in any other way can a man be fair? He ought to consider all sides of all beliefs before he can come to a fair conclusion on any. And, as no man can live long enough to give a careful examination to them all, it would seem to me that a wise man should hold them all in abeyance until investigated. I do not see how one can honestly accept any until he has thoroughly studied them all."

"According to your idea, then," I replied, "you ought to taste of every bottle on the apothecary's shelves in order to find out that it does *not* contain water, before you take the glass which you know to hold water. It would be not only a novel but a dangerous method of quenching your thirst. Seriously, now, when one talks of examining all religions in the interest of fairness, is he fair? *You* did not originate that sentiment. You have heard it from some one else, and never fairly weighed it, or one so intelligent as you could not have used it. Of the 'great religions,' so called, only four or five can be named. Confucianism can be instantly dismissed, for it is not a religion at all, but only a series of ethical precepts. In it there is no trace of belief in a God, nor of the idea of immortality. Buddhism you would not seriously consider for an hour as a religion for yourself. There is a 'fad' just now of esoteric talk, a kind of moral measles which will have its run among a certain class of those who think the new is therefore the true in religion and literature. Sir Edwin Arnold's 'Light of Asia' is his rendering of an ancient poem. But whatever of moral worth there is in Buddhism came from those primitive beliefs which are carried as a dim memory, onward from the

ancient Eden ; those underlying traditions that survive in spite of all perversions. The abnormal and inhuman self-sacrifice of the hero in Sir Edwin Arnold's poem is without moral worth as example. Even if the general duty of self-denial, caught up from the monks who over-ran Asia, and who left behind them traces of distorted Christian story, is spread out in the poem, this is, at Arnold's hands, a non-imitable kind of self-denial. So that neither you nor any other sensible man in England or America, however he may like to see in what way Sir Edwin can dress up a heathen myth, is likely to have the least leaning toward an actual confession of Buddhism as a religion ; much less is any such man likely to undertake the actual practice of Buddhism. So that we may count that religion out.

"There are left only the religions of Moses, of Mohammed, and of Jesus. These had one source. Mohammed finds the basis of his in selections from the other two. That of Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of the Mosaic. But the Mosaic ideas of religion, apart from those of Christ, you would not seriously consider. Practically, in our search for truth, we have to consider the claims of just *one* religion, that of Jesus Christ."

The phrase "search for truth" seemed to displease Mr. B——. He intimated that his purpose was discussion. But I insisted that I had neither time nor disposition for a merely intellectual religious tournament. I said to him:

"I have devoted my life to the search for truth, and to proclaiming it to others. I have done this to the detriment of my pecuniary interest. It has cost me something to be a Christian and a minister. I have a profound con-



viction that there is such a virtue as intellectual honesty—a fair treatment, intellectually, as well as morally, of the highest class of truths the human mind can consider. No system attempts their thorough and consistent treatment except Christianity, for to me it is that religion, or none. I am profoundly in earnest about this class of truths, and I must tell you, frankly and kindly, that if we are to try and find the truth together in these interviews, I shall gladly see you, and will make careful preparation for an orderly discussion. Only I must insist that when we have made a point and agree upon it, we are to set that down as a thing decided by us. Take, for instance, this point we have just considered—the great religions of the world. We need not, we must not, if we are to make any progress in the discussion, go back to them. It is for us, just *one* religion—Christianity, or none. It professes to be a religion. It covers the ground, and none other so much as professes to do that, and the one inquiry is about its truth.”

He replied: “You have given me some things to think about, both with relation to the subjects which are to be considered and the manner of conducting our interviews. I see that to raise general objections and to discuss them specifically would involve an interminable discussion and bring us to no conclusion.”

After a moment, he added: “I may as well say that the idea of coming to any conclusion was not entertained by me.”

I interrupted him to say: “Why then should we talk about the matter if we do not want to reach any positive conviction?”



Instead of directly replying, he seemed to be considering my proposition that our discussion should be not about religions generally, but upon the truth or falsehood of Christianity. For, after a moment, he remarked "that I had narrowed down the line of discussion, while it seemed to him that a good deal might be said about 'comparative religions.'"

I replied "that if whatsoever of worth in the line of ethical precept in any of them were found also in Christianity, then there could be no need of consulting them; that there were some general moral duties that any religion had to recognize; that some of the Buddhistic commandments were exactly like those given by Moses: but that the real value of a religion obtained not only in its precepts enjoining ordinary morality, but in those impulses which flow necessarily from its facts; that the revelation it made of God, the kind of being it presented alike for love and worship was also a primary factor in estimating a religion; that we needed to ascertain whether Christianity was a unique and a special revelation from God to man, and that we must remember that as a remedial scheme of religion it had peculiarities which separated it, by the whole diameter of human thought, from any other."

He remarked: "There is need enough of a redemptive religion which shall rescue men from all the others with their terrible superstitions. I admit that there would be no likelihood of my believing in any other religion. But I see little more likelihood of my believing in the Christian religion; for either because I know more about it than about any other, or because of its inherent diffi-

culties, I must be allowed to say, also, because of its absurdities of miracle and doctrine, I am farther away from believing in it each time I give it attention. But, conceding that we must narrow our inquiries to the claims of Christianity as the one only true religion, I have a formidable list of objections. I might begin with Genesis and geology,—for your New Testament endorses your Old, and so Christianity is responsible for what Moses says,—and I might go on with the story of Eden, and Adam and Eve and the fall; the conduct of the patriarchs, the story of the Red Sea crossing, the barbarous treatment of the inhabitants of Canaan, the whole series of wars said to have been undertaken at God's command, the institution of slavery, and—but, there is no end of these things. And it seems to me that if I wanted to defend Christianity, I would begin by cutting, if I could, the bond that binds it to Judaism, so that it should not be responsible for the Old Testament.”

“On the contrary,” I replied, “I accept the two Testaments because one confirms the other; the older book demands the newer, and the newer explains and develops the wonderful germs in the older. But, letting that point go now, it would be possible to go over your main objections one by one, and to answer them, if not fully, at least fairly, leaving indeed obscurity just where obscurity is to be expected. As to the reconciliation of ‘Genesis and geology,’ there are foremost scholars who, so far from finding any other discrepancy than that which is due to looking upon the same fact from the respective points of ethical impression and scientific statement, are happy in noticing that general agreement of order for which both

contend. And the story of Eden has at least nothing to contradict it; and until we get a better narrative of the origin of the race, it is as well to hold that the race began with one primal pair. Ethnological facts are not only not contradictory, but are best explained by holding that God has made of one blood all the races of mankind. The extermination of the Canaanites, of which you spoke, was never carried out. The original tribes were not disturbed except as they made war on Israel. A set of banditti had seized on the Canaanitish cities, and these were popularly called 'Canaanites,' and these wretched marauders, these usurpers and murderers, who had not the semblance of a right to the land, were given the chance to quit their usurpation or feel the edge of the sword of Joshua. The original inhabitants of the land were Jehovah-worshippers. Palestine was God's land; and the true masters of its soil were friends and fellow-citizens in faith with the Israelites, and would have welcomed them to the land reserved for them. The war was against the usurpers. And even in the actual conflicts, the number that perished was less than those who fell in some single battles of our late war. As to the miracles of the Old Testament, it would not be hard to show that their presence is not as great a difficulty as their absence would have been under the circumstances. But all these are general remarks on your objections. I make them only to show that there is another side to the matter, which you may not have duly considered."

He replied: "I only named these few objections to the Bible incidentally. I have a large number of more formidable ones. They relate to the whole matter of

miracles, the whole idea of a book-revelation like that which Christians claim for their Bible, and," he added, after a moment's pause, "these difficulties are numerous and formidable——"

I interrupted him to say: "And you may as well add interminable. And yet we have only one lifetime for ourselves in which to consider them. Surely there must be some error in your proposed method of stating *seriatim* your difficulties and getting me to answer them. No other subject is investigated in that manner by men who want to come to a conclusion. There is not a matter of human knowledge which men regard as certain, to which objections cannot be offered. Not a fact exists to which ingenuity cannot raise objections, and about which men cannot allege that there are many and grave difficulties. The objections of six thousand years have been employed against religion. And to go through them all, as they are reproduced to-day, would be a hopeless undertaking. Christianity claims to be a historic religion. It claims to be founded on facts. It submits proofs. It asks to be judged by these. Its alleged facts are true or they are false. A few very direct and simple propositions absolutely proved, and Christianity is true. A thousand objections can still be urged. But they do not disturb the established facts which, if true, make us morally certain of the doctrines of the Christian faith. Undeniable difficulties still exist, but they are one after another disappearing. The friends of this system of faith and practice are even more sensitive to these difficulties than are those who reject and oppose this Christianity. But we see that these things are found exactly where difficulties

must needs be ; and so they do not disturb us. The overwhelming weight of evidence we think to be on our side. We have certain fixed facts, and while objections have a kind of force, their force seems to us like that of broken waves on an unmoved rock. Now let us have a regular orderly series of subjects for these conversations. Let us look at the proofs Christianity presents. If they are insufficient or worthless, that ends the matter ; if they are satisfactory, then we shall be in a better position to consider those difficulties that might seem to touch vital matters. Let me have the opportunity to put these proofs before you, starting from any point of your conceded belief. For, on some one or two matters that must lie at the foundation of all religious thinking, such as the being of God and the actuality of the human soul, the certainty of our knowledge, the reliability of our moral convictions of truth and right, we must come to an agreement at the outset. These are the axioms of our moral geometry."

He replied : " You have given me, I confess, some new things to think of during this morning's talk. For one, that the question is concerning the truthfulness of Christianity alone, since it has no real rival ; and the other is about my proposed method of discussion as vicious in kind, and as never leading to any definite conclusions. I must think this matter through before I see you again. I am free to admit that I did not consider my marshalling of objections as an *investigation* at all. You want to lead me over a ground I did not propose to traverse. And yet you may be right in your proposed method. At any rate, by all means, if you can spare the time, call again

one week from this morning and we will continue this subject."

I took my leave of him, resolved that any additional discussion should be in orderly and regular fashion. I had drawn his fire. He had disclosed his own ideas in good degree. I proposed to lay out the lines for future interviews, and to take up one matter at a time, settling each point if possible, as we went on. I had seen men of his class before, and was resolved that when, in our interviews, we arrived at any conclusion, if we should do so, the conclusion should stand.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CREDIBILITY OF EVIDENCE.

AT the appointed time I was at Mr. B——'s library, and found him comfortable. He was eager to begin the discussion. He said he had been thinking a great deal about our interview, and he thought he ought to be allowed to name some preliminary objections before I made any definite presentation of my reasons for believing in the Bible. It was necessary that we should understand each other's position, and it would be best for me to know from his own statements just what was his way of thinking as to these matters before I gave mine. I assented, but also claimed that if the interview for the day was again to be of so general a character as the last, that somewhere in it he should tell me what were the things concerning religion on which he had a *definite belief*, if there were such, so that we might begin from a common plane of conviction.

He thought that fair, and added immediately:

"This is what I have always thought, that the whole matter of religion should be so plain that no actual objection could be raised to it—a kind of demonstration, like that of a problem in mathematics, so that a man could not help believing in it. And when you spoke of your own difficulties that you could not solve and yet averred your firm belief in the Christian religion, it



seemed to me that you thereby gave the whole case away. God should have made it so clear that no reasonable man could help believing it, when such vast interests, running through eternity, as Christians claim, depend on accepting it. It should be so plain that no man could doubt it."

I replied: "I thought you had intimated your disbelief in miracles, and yet you are proposing an unlimited number of them. You are wanting that every individual of the human race, on one subject—you would not think of asking for such a condition on any other—should be rendered incapable of making a mistake. That would be to ask for miracles by the wholesale—miracles, too, not once or twice or thrice performed, but miracles for each one of the millions of the race on every occasion when Christianity might be mentioned or even thought of, in the course of each man's life. Why, the few groups of miracles in the Bible are trivial compared with what you propose to have done. An infallible hope is a great deal to ask; but, in your demand, every man is to be infallible. You not only demand that the proof shall satisfy the great masters of thought, so that not a doubt is possible, but that each one of the 'ordinary ten thousand' of the race shall not be able to have a doubt. Your standard is not whether Christianity shall be reasonable to God, to Christ, to men like the apostle Paul, and to the other great masters of religious reasoning, but that it shall be made to appear reasonable to *every man, so as to be beyond doubt*. And such a thing can be done only by working hourly miracles on the minds of men.



“You propose that illogical methods of reasoning shall be eliminated from men’s minds, on this one subject; that all prejudices and misconception shall depart, on religious matters; that the moral enmity to condemnatory truth which always rises in the minds of wicked men shall no more influence them on this thing; that heredity, through which comes so much of human belief and misbelief, shall no more affect men on this matter of religious opinion and conviction. It would be a stupendous series of stupendous miracles. Do you really mean that you ask all that?”

He waited a few moments before replying. At length he said:

“This is a new view of the subject. I have put a good deal of weight on the argument that the truth of religion should be so plain that it *could not possibly be doubted*. The position may not be as strong as I had thought, but I am not quite ready to abandon it.” Pausing a moment more, he added: “And yet, I see that my position involves the greatest miracles for the least reasonable and for the lowest of the race. And if I were arguing on your side, I would claim that such miracles would put a premium upon ignorance and vice.”

“Yes,” I said, “I am sure that you are laboring under an *impression* rather than resting on an argument when you insist that the evidence of religion shall be so clear that not an objection can be raised against it.”

“It may be that I have not enough considered what that position would involve. But in answering my objection, have you not laid your side open to a far more serious one? You admit the force of prejudice and passion,

the influence of heredity and the unreasonableness of man, notwithstanding we call him a 'reasoning animal.' Do you not see the bearing of all this on what are called the 'evidences of Christianity'? The credibility of witnesses to an alleged miracle is a very important thing. Historic credibility is to be established. Certainty in this very uncertain world of ours is to be gained, or you cannot ask a man to act morally with any show of reason."

"But this is new ground," I replied. "Your new position is exactly the opposite of the old. You would have it, just now, that there should be no doubt, and now you argue for all as doubtful. All miracle you wanted; and now, you will have none of it because everything is so uncertain. Your Bible, in order to be credible, was to be miraculous—at least, every reader of it was to read miraculously—and now you will have it that there can be no credible testimony to anything that is miraculous. Are you not a little hard to suit? Either one or the other of your positions is untenable. To demand of Christianity these antagonistic things is obviously unfair. Make your choice, and then we can go on."

"Well, I take the latter ground," he said, "for I can admit anything rather than miracles."

"It is for you, to-day," I said, "to take the lead and state your position. I must say, however, that I am very glad that you are going to state the negative side of the question as to the 'credibility of evidence.' I was intending that our whole interview to-day should be devoted to that one subject. You save me the trouble by telling me why you distrust testimony on the subject. Your position

I understand now to be that human testimony on this matter is *not* credible ; perhaps you distrust it on any subject."

"I have good reason to believe in the credulity of human nature. I think I could argue it from the readiness of men to believe in religions."

"Pardon me," I said, "we have left religions. The whole question is now of religion—of one religion—of Christianity."

"I had forgotten," he replied. "But see that pile of circulars. Every friend is sending me the certificates of cure wrought by some patent medicine. It is impossible, after making all allowances for fraudulent certificates, that many of these dupes should not actually believe that the wretched humbug did them good. 'Human testimony!'" he exclaimed, with not a little irritation, "why you can get it to anything, however absurd. Carlyle's remark about so many millions in Great Britain, 'mostly fools,' seems to me sometimes too near the truth. Then, see those newspapers"—pointing to a stack of them—"and whole pages of testimonials about quack medicines. And money is made by them and people believe in them. What is the value of human belief under such circumstances? And some of these cure-alls—more's the pity—are put up by regularly educated physicians. Only think how uncertain is that whole science of medicine! What wretched preparations have been used for remedies in past ages, which are now the derision of our modern practitioners; the ages that were, too, when your Bible was being written. Is there anything more uncertain than medical science? Even its best advocates allow

this. And yet my friends will insist on sending me these advertisements of remedies for my specific form of disease, though the doctor says it is incurable."

"Ah! then you have employed a doctor?" I said.

"Certainly," he replied.

"But on your principles why do you do so unreasonable a thing? Medicine is an uncertain science. Whole ages of mistakes are behind it. Imposture and quackery have marked its whole history. Senseless prescriptions can boast the largest number of certified cures. Let us discard the whole system. Certainty is what we want. If we turn away from the miraculous, we have uncertainty as the other horn of the dilemma. Now, my dear sir, you did not reason in that manner when you called in your physician. You acted on the weight of evidence, knowing just as well as you do to-day, the fraud and imposition which have sheltered themselves under the name of medicine. You knew very well that there was no 'mathematical certainty' about your physician's art. There were reasons for, and reasons against calling in Dr. S——. You saw which way the evidence preponderated, and acted on a moral certainty. You trusted Dr. S——, that he knew more about the matter than you did; that he was no quack; that he had been a student of medicine, and that his advice was worth having and paying for. Your life, your precious life, you put into his hands. Your objections all vanished before another class of facts, when you found yourself seriously sick. All you had said about 'charm,' and 'spell,' and 'incantations,' and 'absurd practices of middle ages,' and 'patent medicine frauds in this age,' and your frequent

quotation of Voltaire's *mot* 'that physicians put drugs of which they know nothing into bodies about which they know less'—all this talking against physicians during the fifteen years you were not sick, went for nothing, when you discovered that you were actually a sick man. So different a thing is it to face a theory and to face a fact! So different a thing is it to talk when we do not have to act, and then talk and decide when there is something to be done that involves vast issues."

He said: "I see where your argument leads. Only I must say that it takes advantage of what a man does when he is sick."

"No," I replied, "you are not too sick to reason about a matter, or I should not be here to talk with you. I only want to call your attention to the fact that for many years in speaking of medicine you emphasized the wrong side. It is possible that you may have done so in regard to religion."

He made no reply.

I continued: "You asked me one week ago to act as witness of your signature to an important paper drawn up by your attorney. I have no doubt that you have often thought of the mistakes of courts, the knavery of some lawyers, the injustice of judges and juries; of the contested wills, the perverted bequests, the rapacity of heirs, the quarrels of legatees, the terrible enmities that come from legal quibbles over the most carefully drawn documents. But these facts did not seriously disturb you last week. You have no doubt of the uprightness of Lawyer D——, and of the equity of the Probate Judge of this county. When you have given due weight to all

that can be said about legal injustice, you have still a working faith in the machinery of law; and, like a sensible man, you have your will drawn up, properly signed, legally witnessed, and carefully deposited in your safe. The weight of evidence was on that side, and you acted upon it. There is no mathematical certainty in the case. It is not a question about 'whether two and two make four or not.' But there was good, fair, reasonable evidence; a sufficient certainty to warrant belief and corresponding action.

"Further, my dear Mr. B——, when you were in business, you knew that there were knaves in the commercial world; that forged cheques were uttered sometimes; that there were men who obtained goods under false pretences; that cashiers now and then defaulted; that bookkeepers made false entries, and that confidential agents sometimes absconded. Had you considered only that class of facts, you would never have been the successful man in business you were twenty years ago. But you knew that if there was one dishonest clerk, there were a thousand who were honest and faithful; that, if a majority of business men, or anything approaching that proportion, had been untrustworthy, or had been believed to be so, no business could have been done; that the foundation of all business is confidence, faith, or trust. You trusted men because the balance, the evidence was on the side of trusting. For that reason you invested your money. You knew the facts on both sides. And you had an influential belief, a working faith in the trustworthiness of business men and business methods. It was not mathematical evidence, and you had the good



sense not to require it to be such. Business scepticism would have been unreasonable in your case, and you would have been without your snug fortune to-day. You acted rightly, on probability, not perhaps recalling the dictum of Butler that 'probability is the guide of life.' On evidence very far from certitude, the statesman is obliged to act, the philosopher to propound his doctrines, and the physician to prescribe for his patient. There are difficulties in religion, and, for that matter, in everything else on which men are called to act. If we are going to wait for mathematical certainty, we may be excused from action anywhere in life. For even the axioms on which geometry is founded are assumed rather than proved. It works well to take them, believe them, and act upon them. I urge action on religion exactly as elsewhere on good, fair evidence, notwithstanding difficulties exactly parallel to those met by physicians and their patients, by business men and their customers.

"Of course, all evidence is not good evidence. There were poor witnesses in the first and in the fourth Christian centuries, as there are in this nineteenth century. Some witnesses in every century are untrustworthy, and others are credible. To urge, as some have done, against the credibility of the Christian documents, that in the centuries when they were written, there were poor witnesses; that superstition then abounded in which credulous people believed, and that therefore all witnessing in those centuries is unreliable, is a style of argument that is as lacking in fairness as it is in logic. Each century has its peculiar stamp, as each man has his own personal equation. But good, fair, reliable evidence is obtainable

to-day as to facts now occurring, though there never was an age with more humbug and imposition than our own. Could Mormonism have so risen and flourished by appeal to evidence in any other century than this? But credible evidence is still obtainable for actual occurrences. Every age has had fair witnesses, and beside them are men not to be believed. No truth but can gain testimony; no falsehood but can secure false witnesses. Instead of saying that everything can be proved, which is equivalent to saying that nothing can be proved, we are to sift testimony and give credit where credit is due. It is absurd to deny the force of all testimony in a given age because of incompetent evidence in support of superstition and fraud. The work of every court in Christendom to-day is to sift testimony; to weigh the worth of witness for and against a given case; to find out the preponderance of the evidence. It is the same with a merchant who buys and sells in the world's markets. He judges and weighs, and so decides. In law, in medicine, in politics, in every department of human activity, we do not always act on any mathematical certainty, but we listen to statements, weigh the character and estimate the worth of conflicting testimony, and act according to weight of the evidence. It must be so in religion. If not, then why not?"

He replied, after a few moments' thought: "Yes, I think the analogy good and the reasoning fair. I am afraid my new ground is hardly more tenable than the old. But"—after a pause—"I have two things to say. The first is that if we are to act in religion in this way, after discovering the balance of evidence as we do in



ordinary affairs, and I own that I do not see why we should not, then what need have we for a Bible in religion any more than for a Bible in medicine? The second thing I want to say is, that your argument for the reliability of evidence is better anywhere else than on a historic question. Your New Testament claims to be a historic book, and we want historic certainty, a much more difficult thing to secure than any of these other kinds you have named."

I answered: "As to your first remark about our not needing the Bible, let me say that I will take it up in due time. We must not get too far away to-day from this matter of the 'credibility of evidence.'"

"You must admit," he said, "that when it is difficult for a police court to decide on the evidence in the case of a street row, that when there are hardly any two men who, looking out at a window on the same scene, can report a fact in the same way, when each man's personality colors his vision in commonest things, you must surely admit that events historically distant are liable to be so inaccurately reported as to make any evidence for them extremely doubtful, especially when they are so far away as nineteen slowly moving centuries from our time, and when they relate to such very peculiar occurrences as those which your New Testament writers allege to have taken place."

"Take care," I said, "for you are striking not only at Christianity as a historic religion, but at all human history as well. History is a thing of yesterday, and also of a thousand years ago. And whether you credit yesterday's alleged occurrences or those of a thousand years

ago, depends not at all on the nearness of the one set of facts and the remoteness of the other, but on the reliability of the witnesses in either case. Yesterday's occurrence supported by untrustworthy witnesses is less certain than that of a thousand years ago supported by competent testimony. Within this 'historic period' you may leave out the question of the near and the remote, and the facts of Christianity fall far within the times of undoubted and reliable history."

"But," he replied, "the old Roman fables are now eliminated from genuine and received history."

"True," I answered. "But those were outside the recognized circle of credible history."

"But," he instantly replied, "your Old Testament is far beyond that limit."

"Yes," was the answer. "Of itself, it is more ancient. But you insisted in our last interview, that the New Testament, by its endorsement of the Old Testament, was responsible for what you called its cruelties, etc. It is a poor rule that does not work both ways. And so, for our discussion, let it be true that because the New endorses the Old Testament, we need not go back beyond the New Testament time, which is far within the period of authentic history. Remember that Euclid had lived, and that geometry has not advanced by the breadth of a hair since his day: that 'the science of evidence' was as well developed at the time when the Gospels began to be known as it is in our own times. The clear legal conceptions, afterward gathered up into the Justinian code already existed in Christ's time. And the Roman was then, as always, a jurist, with an eye for legal proof.

The advent of the documents was in the clearest, intellectual age of the world ; and from that statement many would not except our nineteenth century, a century so great in material life that its intellectual life has suffered eclipse therefrom. 'These things were not done in a corner.'"

I further insisted that he was as much bound to account for the New Testament as a literary fact coming into that age as I was ; that he, as an intelligent man, was under as much obligation as myself to have a reason for what he did with the Bible. If he rejected it, it must be for a consistent reason, and that a series of miscellaneous objections was not a theory of the Book which was the only real candidate on earth for the place of a Revelation from God ; that he must account for not only the Book, but for the fact that the evidence for it had prevailed in the most critical century of human history.

That usually, they who had made this matter of its historic evidence the line of their special study, were best convinced that the evidence was sound and trustworthy ; that the New Testament did not originate in an age of fable, but in the Augustan age, the least credulous age in history ; that our present Gospels had stood the test of critical investigation, when, centuries ago, the false and mythical Gospels had been separated from the true by the same process that had been applied to myths and Roman story within the last one hundred years ; that the Gospels made a distinct claim to be veritable historic documents, and that he was bound to account for their existence and the credence they had gained as much as I was : that he was as much under obligation to have

a good, fair, reasonable theory on which he should reject them as I to have a good theory for accepting them ; that he and I and every well-informed man accepted the writings of historians older than the New Testament without hesitation and with no hint that these writings were untrustworthy because evidence of alleged fact could not in those ages be obtained. It was not a question of an ancient or a modern event, but solely one of the trustworthiness of the writers. I said :

“ You must admit that there is such a thing as historic evidence and historic credibility. Events as old as those of the Gospels *can* be proved.”

He admitted it, only saying that it was one thing to say that an event occurring in that century can be proved, and quite another to admit that a specific thing is actually proven ; to which I, of course, assented ; since the credibility of evidence was the only point I was aiming to establish, as against his general denial of evidence as trustworthy on historic matters.

He suggested that the originals of the documents of the New Testament were lost ; and I reminded him that it was the same with the autograph copies of Homer and Virgil and Herodotus ; that even the original manuscript of Shakespeare had disappeared, and so had that of Bacon’s immortal work—all of which was to be expected, and might be regretted by antiquaries, but was not regarded as imperilling the authenticity or credibility of their writings, or the trustworthiness of the copies at present known. I said that Senators of the United States argued on the constitutionality of certain bills, reading the Constitution from any printed copy that they

happened to have on hand, and no man raised the legal quibble that they did not bring into the Supreme Court Room or into the Senate Chamber the original document from its case in the State Department, and put their finger on the line and the word they quoted.

The good common sense of fair-minded men did not go into the legal requirement of the original document. Judging from its present faded appearance, in less than one hundred years, the original copy of the famous Declaration of Independence will soon be illegible, and, it may be, will be destroyed by the tooth of time. But not one of all the millions of Americans who have never seen the original, but who have the document several removes from the manuscript copy, will have any doubt about any line or word of it.

The proof-reading of the copyists of the olden time was as accurate as that of the *Riverside Press* of to-day. There has been no need of a miracle to secure the transmission of a document since the beginning of the Christian era. Authentic writings on other subjects, which were far more likely to be destroyed than those of the New Testament, are existing in their substantial integrity, and scholars discuss them, line by line, to-day. True, there are also "various readings" in these writings, exactly as in the copies of the New Testament. But these do not destroy the value or integrity of Homer and Virgil any more than in the case of the Four Gospels.

He said: "I thought you believed in the inspiration of the New Testament?"

I answered: "That matter will come up in due order. I am trying now to show that there can be trustworthy

history in the case ; that the documents can be historically accurate ; that, considered simply as so much literature, these Gospels and epistles are capable of being authenticated. There is nothing inherently impossible in their credibility."

"I admit," he said, "that I cannot dispute your position. And I would be ready to grant the substantial credibility of the narratives, at least, and would urge nothing against it, if the New Testament contained only ordinary historic facts. But there are the miracles. It is no use to talk about it. *I cannot believe in miracles.*"

At this point Mr. B—— seemed not a little exhausted. I looked at my watch and found that the conversation, the outline of which is herewith given, had occupied an hour and a half. Apologizing for its length, I hastily closed my visit. He exacted from me the promise of an hour for the following week. He reiterated his words, "I cannot believe in miracles," and asked me to be sure to take up the discussion at that point at the very next interview.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES.

VISITING Mr. B—— the week following, I found him in his library and more comfortable than I had feared. After the usual inquiries, he took up eagerly the discussion at the point where he had left it.

He said: "On thinking the thing over, I confess my misgivings as to my former position, that the evidence for Christianity ought to be so certain that a man could not possibly have a doubt; and, also, my intimation that historically credible evidence cannot come to us from the Augustan age for an alleged event. But when an alleged event in that or in any other age is miraculous, I demur. I cannot believe in a miracle."

He repeated the assertion two or three times with unusual energy and positiveness in his tone and manner.

I remarked to him "that his assertion was apparently his Gibraltar," and he replied "that he could not, he thought, be driven from that position."

I said: "Now tell me why you cannot believe in a miracle."

"Well, I would say, first of all, it is incredible that such a thing should occur."

"Incredible to *whom*?" I asked. "It is not so to me, nor to millions of the human race, who can see good reasons for divine intervention at certain great eras in the moral history of the world. To most men there would



seem to be a probability of such events as things occurring not often, but coming at the introduction of new dispensations, and as the authentication of a divine message or messenger. They are not probable as daily occurrences. But that I do not claim for them. The incredible thing to me would be that they should never be granted to men. And when you say 'a miracle is incredible,' I ask again, 'incredible to *whom*?' Incredible to you, in your present mood, a miracle may be. But you must not claim that it is incredible to universal man. Men as good reasoners as are you and I have accepted miracles. You must not say that miracles belong to the category of things impossible to be believed; incredible, because the mind of man cannot credit them. Men do credit miracles. The human mind is so constituted as to be able to receive them, under certain circumstances. I think you would say that if there were to be given a revelation from God, similar to that claimed for the Bible, you would expect God to furnish something of the kind, and you would require miracles before you would believe in that kind of Bible."

"I certainly should," was his quick reply.

"So then," I said, "when you call miracles incredible you mean only this, that they are incredible not to mankind—for mankind has almost universally believed in miracles of some sort—but that the miracles of the New Testament are incredible to you. You may recall the fact that Hume, arguing for the rejection of all miracles on the ground that they were contrary to the uniform experience of mankind, said, 'I have discovered an argument which will be useful as long as the world en-



dures, *for so long I presume will the account of miracles be believed.*' Well, if men will believe them so long as the world endures, what becomes of his own celebrated argument about 'miracles as contrary to the universal experience of mankind.' Miracles are credited by as fine and careful and scholarly minds as ever were found on the planet."

"But," he answered, "all men are not reasonable on every point, and the matter of religion is the one on which they are most lacking in reason. I cannot avoid the conclusion that miracles are unreasonable."

"Unreasonable to whom?" I said. "Take care how you talk about the 'other eleven unreasonable jurymen on the jury.' Besides, miracles are God's things. That they are reasonable to him is enough reason for them; his is the one standard reason. He is not obliged, when, in his wisdom, he sees that a miracle is needful to his plans of gracious intervention and salvation, to make the reasons for the miracle plain to us before he works it. Afterward we may be delighted in seeing it as the manifestation of his love and grace. The question is this: Is the miracle reasonable to him? It may or may not be a reasonable thing to a given man at a given time. To two men of equal reasoning power, there may be a very unequal knowledge of the facts in a given case. The one man may give a verdict on the facts as he knows them. The other may know certain vital facts not before the mind of the former, and so may render just the opposite verdict. Only one being knows all the facts of God's broad plan. God only can decide whether a miracle, in given circumstances, is needed, and so is reasonable.

“Still further, a miracle is always an inference from facts, and these facts can always be proved as facts exactly as can any other facts. In strictness of language, facts are not miraculous; we infer the miracle from them. This table before us is made of black walnut. Let us suppose now a miracle—a miracle, not at all of the New Testament kind, having as those miracles always have, a moral end; but a miracle that is a mere freak of power. This is a fact, that here is a black walnut table. We shut our eyes; we open them again; and, lo! the table is marble. It was of wood; it is of stone. The first fact and the second fact are proved in exactly the same way. It takes no more evidence of eyesight and of touch to assure us in the one case than in the other. We infer the miracle. That is all there is about it. The fact of wood in one case and stone in the other are equally facts to be proven by the senses of touch and sight. The evidence, both in kind and in amount, that will prove the one to be wood will prove the other to be stone. To you and to me there would be miracle, as an inference. But a man who saw the walnut table at ten o'clock this morning, and who should see the marble one at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, would need no special evidence for the existence of the one table over the other. He could testify that he had seen both. His evidence would be credible in both cases. A fact is a fact; that it is miraculous is our inference about the fact.”

He looked up with surprise, and finally said: “I have always thought that a miraculous fact must have miraculous evidence; but I see that it is not so.”

“What would you say,” he remarked, after a mo-

ment's pause, "to the proposition that a miracle is impossible?"

"In what sense impossible? Do you mean impossible as related to God's plan, and as related to God's power; or do you mean that you think a miracle is impossible in the sense that it cannot be proved by evidence?"

He replied: "Well, take it in all three senses. It might be well argued, first of all, that God has made perfect laws; has made out a perfect scheme of things, in which, so far as we can see, there is no place for miracle."

"But," I answered, "is the 'physical scheme of things' the only scheme of things there is? And, if it were the all, if it were not a subordinate scheme, can you show that the physical scheme of things at special eras has no place for miracle? Creation, whether by evolution as its form or not, must have somewhere started in the Divine fiat. 'He spake and it was done.' It was a something that came in upon what was the order of things before it; and that was miracle with reference to the preceding scheme. The *whole* physical plan includes the miraculous creation of the germ or germs out of which all the physical universe has grown. It may comprehend, also, its ending as it did its beginning, and unseen interventions as well, along its whole course. But the physical plan is not the whole plan of things. The physical is naturally subject to the moral scheme of things; and the two, the physical and the moral scheme are together the one great system of God's universe. The final ends must be moral ends. If God's moral ends require miracles, miracles will obtain; and when they come there will not be anything not provided for origin-

ally in the perfect plan. I shall try to show you in the course of our discussion that the moral scheme requires a supernatural personage, a miraculous personage, about whom miracles necessarily gather, since they are wrought for moral ends, and that these miracles are not so much buttresses of moral teachings as they are the fit expression of moral ideas in physical forms. In a single sentence, this is my reply to your question: That no man knows the whole reach of God's plans, the whole reach of the 'established order of things,' and so no man is entitled to say that the whole moral and physical order of things is such as to make miracles impossible.

"As regards the second point, viz., miracles impossible with relation to the power that is able to perform them, nothing need be said. For surely, if there be a God, he is able to work a miracle."

He at once assented, adding, "It would be absurd to hold that God could not, so far as power is concerned, do a miraculous thing. But I am not satisfied," he continued, "with your former argument."

"Let me state it again," I said. "It is, in a word, that when a man says a miracle is impossible because it is contrary to the 'whole established order of things,' he assumes the Omniscience, which knows the whole order of things both physical and moral, and has discovered that a miracle can have no place anywhere in God's wide universe. To say that a miracle is impossible is to assume that one knows all the possibilities in God's plan of things."

He was silent; but whether he yielded the point or not, I could not decide.

After a little he remarked : " Your second point, viz., a miracle possible with reference to an adequate power to perform it, no believer in a God would deny. But when Hume says a 'miracle is impossible,' I think he refers to the impossibility of proving it by competent evidence."

I replied : " It would be a singular thing to say that God could do the miracle, but could not prove that he had done it ! That were a startling absurdity when stated in plain English. And yet, that is Hume's argument put into other words. He would claim that 'no amount of evidence can prove a miracle,' because 'a miracle is contrary to *our* experience, and nature does not transcend certain limits.' But how does Mr. Hume know that nature does not transcend the limits *he* fixes for her. No testimony, though it were of one's own senses, to a miracle would be accepted as valid proof of one ; because it is 'contrary to uniform testimony.' And this is the curious result : That the man who should have the testimony of his own senses to a miracle is to leave that, and fall back on the trust in the testimony of others who have not seen it and who aver that their testimony is in accordance with the 'general experience of mankind.' The truth is, God cannot be shut up to such limits as to be able to perform a miracle and then not be able to prove it—*i. e.*, furnish testimony sufficient to make it credible."

"But," he answered, very quickly, "you would not receive the fact of a miracle on no better or stronger evidence than you would an ordinary fact."

"I must say, as I said just now, a fact is a fact, and

it is an inference that any fact is miraculous. But then the true miracle is not to be judged of apart from its moral relations; and there is needed especial evidence of these as well as of the facts. The physical fact is not the only one. And the fact judged to be miraculous is only one stone in an arch, and it has fellow-stones on either side of it. I would scan the evidence on both points very closely. I would consider the whole matter of the trustworthiness of the witnesses, and of their likelihood to deceive or to be deceived. But I would also give weight to the setting of the alleged miracle, in time and place, and to the end sought, and to the connection with moral teaching, and to the miracle considered with reference to the miracle-worker."

"According to that view, you would," he said, "require fewer and poorer witnesses for a miracle than for an ordinary event."

"No," I said, "you mistake me. I make a difference between witness and evidence. The witnesses are to be carefully watched, and their testimony most severely scrutinized. But that of eyewitnesses is not all the evidence. Evidence comes, also, from the fitness of the teaching to go with the miracle; from the fitness of the miracle-worker to be entrusted with the working of it; from the harmony of his character with his mission; from the precise era in which the miracle is wrought—since miracles are not promiscuously scattered through the Bible, but come in eras;—from the miracle, not merely or even mainly, as an evidential thing, but as a part of the system itself, in which a supernatural religion is in the process of revelation, so that the miracle is the

natural thing to the circumstances, and the reasonable thing in the system where we find it. By all means let us have the witnesses ; let us have no mistake about their facts. But their witness is not more important than is the evidence that comes to us from this wonderful harmony of the miracle with the moral teaching. And when any man shall get into the heart of God's plan of things, and see how part corresponds to part, and all with the obvious design of the vast scheme, he will find that the ' Christian evidences ' are superabundant. There will come upon him the conviction that the miracle of Christ is no separate thing, no mere exhibit of power, but that it exactly befits the moral character and the moral mission of him who performs it ; and instead of saying it is ' incredible,' he will feel that it commends itself easily to our minds even as it comes easily and graciously from his hands."

In this report of my third conversation with Mr. B——, I have given not only the argument on that occasion, but the general line of our reasoning in the two subsequent interviews. He had begged the privilege of going over my argument on the topic of "Miracles Impossible," and of reviewing his copious notes upon that theme. As nothing new was elicited, in either his objections or my arguments at the other interviews, I have condensed the substance of three conversations into one chapter. I was certain that his confidence in his position had been thoroughly shaken. He had repeatedly said: "I never saw these things in this light before." The gladiatorial spirit, which had sought only

an intellectual encounter, had largely disappeared. Moral earnestness was rapidly taking its place. He was rousing himself to see the interest involved in these things of religion. There was obviously a desire, more or less strong, to know the truth. He was gradually becoming ready to be intellectually fair as well as morally right.



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PERSONALITY OF GOD.

IT was a beautiful morning when, according to appointment, I called again on Mr. B——, to find him not so comfortable as at our last interview. He was sitting in his reclining chair, and looking so worn that I at once proposed to defer our conversation until another day. He would not consent. He owned that he had become deeply interested in the theme; more so than ever before. It was occupying his thought very fully. Some of my answers to his objections had opened new lines of reflection to him. He said that “my side of the question,” as he called it,—though I had once or twice objected to his phrase—“had gained in his mind, by the fairness with which I had allowed him, thus far, to state his difficulties; that he had thought that ministers were not acquainted at all with modern objections, and did not care for them, but persisted in laying down, Sunday after Sunday, a regular course of systematic theology which was thoroughly antiquated, and were insisting that a man should believe it ‘*nolens, volens.*’ ”

I begged leave to remind him that the average New England minister in the three or four leading denominations, was a liberally educated man, who, in addition to his collegiate course, had also probably spent his three years in the study of Theological Science—a degree of

education not surpassed in any other profession in America. I quoted to him the remark of a leading publisher that, "but for the purchase of the works of Strauss, Paulus, Renan, and similar writers, by clergymen who, denominationally, were wholly out of sympathy with such writers, these works could not be published in this country." These clergymen keep thoroughly abreast of theological thought, even when they regard it as erroneous. As for theological fact being old, it is in the same category as geologic fact and chemical fact, both of which have to do with very ancient things. No one reproaches chemistry because its law of chemical combination is so old, nor astronomy with the fact of its ancient stars. There are scientists who absurdly suppose that all the thinking of the world is done about their theories of science. The material advancement of the century pushes materialistic studies into prominence; but, after all, the "proper study of mankind is man," to which the theologian adds: "and the study also of God."

"But," I said, "let us get at our work for to-day. You were to tell me what you do really believe, be it much or little, about religion; so that I may know where to begin in my argument for Christianity."

"I fear I shall shock you," he said, after a few moments' thought, "if I say, candidly, that I believe in a God and in an immortality of the human soul, and I am not certain that I believe anything else about religion. If I do, as you go on, I will freely concede it."

"Is the God in whom you believe a personal God?"

"Why, yes; I think so. Still, any idea of God is to me a little nebulous. I think of him as a sort of diffused

ether ; a kind of ever-present force, like gravity in the physical world. Only he must be in the world of mind as well as in the physical universe. He is thought—pure thought. The conception suits me that you religious people are using a good deal just now, when you talk of the immanence of God, his continuous presence in everything.”

I said : “ Yes, but we are talking in religious circles also of the transcendence of God ; of God as over and above as well as in and through all things. It takes both ideas in combination, or you get no being great enough to call God.”

He replied : “ I suppose I must concede that in some sense or other God is a being as well as an influence. But I confess that I would like to hear what you have to say in behalf of the personality of God. I know very well Spencer’s phrase, ‘ Unknowable Power,’ and Matthew Arnold’s ‘ power which makes for righteousness,’ and similar designations, and they cover a good many things ; but I do not see why such writers ascribe thought and plan as well as power to him, and then refuse him his name of *God*. Frederick Harrison has pointed out, in a recent review, the fact of the unwillingness of Spencer and Huxly to say ‘ God ’ squarely, instead of going all about the idea to find some new name. It seems to me that Spencer would have the God whose name he avoids, a being of power without thought. His God seems to be a stream of potency with a tendency to a good end. I would go as far the other way, and say that it is rather as pure Thought, than as pure Power, that he impresses me. But let me say again, that I would

like to listen to an argument on the personality of God."

Without directly replying, I asked him "if he had ever thought of God as possessing a definite character."

He looked up with some surprise.

I said: "You concede for him power, and claim for him thought. Now, is there any moral quality in his nature? These attributes cannot be conceived of as unswayed by some other quality. For a God only powerful would be frightful, and a God only or mainly wise might be more frightful still, in thwarting and circumventing us. Power and wisdom are terrible in such a being, apart from the character which determines their use. Such a being might be an infinite foe of all goodness. Something must rule these qualities, or they may make for anything but noble ends. That something is moral. Wise ends must be morally wise ends. Moral ends are in their nature regal and final ends. Matthew Arnold recognizes the idea that in the God, even in the impersonal God he so reluctantly admits, there is a trend toward the right. God is to him a stream of tendency that makes for righteousness. But it must be that the moral character of God is of far greater weight than the 'Power' of which Spencer usually speaks, or than the 'Pure Thought' which you so applaud. Even Fiske, in his 'Cosmic Philosophy,' says: 'God is, in his deepest sense, a moral being;' though he is ever arguing, notwithstanding his admission, for some sort of a 'quasi physical' God, exactly as Spencer leans to a God who is 'Power' rather than intelligence. Fichte insists that 'the active moral order is God.' Exactly what Fichte and Fiske mean, and

where they are to be classed, I need not inquire. I mention them in connection with Spencer, to show that they admit that the moral idea comes in and has a force. And I claim that, if it has any force, it is the chief factor; it is the controlling idea; because moral ideas are always of highest rank. They are regnant, because of their character. The supreme thing cannot be power with Spencer, nor pure thought with those who reject Spencer's method, and yet come to his result of an impersonal God in some other way. He must not only be thought, but his thought must be moral; not only must he have ends that he seeks which are wise, but they must be wisely moral ends."

I added, after a moment: "Now, here is the argument for personality in God. It can even be argued solely from 'Power,' for all force is in mind."

He interrupted me to say: "I well remember when and where I first learned the truth that force is originated in mind alone. It was from Bowen's 'Lowell Lectures;' and it opened for me a new wide world of thinking. And yet," he continued as if speaking to himself, "while I must admit that mind is always personal so far as we know it, if I thought mainly of mere power—physical power, as does Spencer, or psychical power, as does Fiske, in getting at the idea of God—perhaps the impersonal conception would equally meet the case."

"Would it any better meet the case than the personal idea?"

"No; I concede that your view would be at least as good."

"But the consideration of mere power," I said, "is by

no means the main thing. And even if it were such, the volition, the actual will of a personal God seems to me a far more simple and logical way of accounting for the exercise of power. One need go no farther than such a being with such a will."

"And how would the doctrine of Evolution affect your argument?"

"In no way, whatsoever," I answered. "For Evolution has reference solely to the mode in which a thing is done, and not at all to the power by which it is wrought. If the universe had been struck out by a single fiat of God, so as to stand just as we see it to-day, it would not have shown, so far as I can see, any more power than is shown by distributing the force through the past ages, beginning as a single germ. The latter method would seem to many to show more wisdom; for it exhibits more laws in play. Greater skill in their use would appear to an onlooker, but not more power. Power, in its last analysis, resides in personality. But to you, who think so much more of God as thought, the argument for the divine personality ought to be especially strong. Thinking, in a human mind, is judging of things as true or false. It rests on a conviction that there is a distinction between the true and the false. It recognizes the fact that there is such a thing as error; and error is that which is measured by some standard, and it is error because it is not like the standard truth. There must, then, be some infinite mind to which all truth is ever present. There must be a judge to constitute an error. An ultimate intelligence must be the ground and measure of all our finite thought. We think

toward the true, in that way gaining knowledge. And this grand faculty of knowing in us cannot be conceived of as the result of a force which is itself without the power of knowing. Thinking means a thinker. Furthermore; if there be no thinking God, then an impersonal necessity binds us; and, since we cannot, in that case, be other than we are, it is idle to talk of 'the true' or 'the false' as a thing having any worth or any worthlessness. All such distinction departs. To say that a thing can be otherwise than it is, in the line of the true or false, is to say that there is another power outside the forces of nature which could have brought about a different result,—which is the very thing the impersonal view denies. Atheism is interested in declaring against such an outside power. For it sees that the 'outside power' may be God. While we, who hold that some mind thinks and plans, see in this outside working the personal force of a personal God. If thought be impersonal, in God and in man, then all ideas, and all plans and judgments and opinions, are unavoidably what they are. And so they are all equally true, and so equally praiseworthy and equally commendable,—which is the same thing as saying that they are not true and praiseworthy and commendable at all. So that impersonal necessity is an absurdity. For we are made up, as men, in such a way as to believe in 'the true' and 'the false,' and all our thinking rests on that innate conviction. And there must be a standard mind in which resides the perfect judgment of what is true and false. You, Mr. B——, called God the 'pure thought,' which can only mean the perfect thinking of a perfect thinker. If



human knowledge comes only from a person, shall the source and head and perfection of all intelligence be found in one who is less than a person ? ”

“There is a good deal in that view of the matter,” he said, “of which I have not thought. I have been putting down notes here, on this slip of paper, so as to be able to think this thing through during the week, before our next interview. I am afraid I have been rather a believer in the impersonal God than in him as a person. Spencer’s emphasis on power has led me in that direction. If I might account for the universe of men, things, and laws on the impersonal theory, the moment I come up into the sphere of mind and thought I see the difficulty. I will admit this much, that the personal theory is simpler, more natural, and, it seems to me, more thoroughly adequate for meeting the case than the other.”

I said : “If theism meets the conditions of the problem equally well and is simpler and more natural, then it should be accepted. For the universe either has a purpose or it has not. Soulless material is not naturally thought of as having a purpose. A personal being akin, in kind of faculty, to man, but vastly superior in amount of faculty, is the conception to which there is, in human history, a constant tendency. Men will believe in a personal God. If it is a kind of mental insanity, then so much the worse for the race, for then we are hopelessly at sea, in any line of conviction.”

“But all this,” I continued, “is but the introduction to the more complete proof—the moral argument. You have not a doubt about the mental world as a reality—



*i. e.*, the world where the fundamental law is that of 'the true and the false.' Now have you any more doubt of the moral world—*i. e.*, the world where the standard is 'the right and the wrong?' Are you not fixed in the idea that, as God is 'pure thought,' as you called him, so he is also 'pure right'—*i. e.*, is God in the sphere of rightness, or, as we religious people more commonly call it, righteousness?"

He hesitated. He then said: "You are coming now into a realm of things that I have never emphasized. I have put the emphasis elsewhere."

"Precisely," I added, "as Herbert Spencer has emphasized 'Power' in God, so you have emphasized 'Thought,' in God. You think he should put at least equal stress on your conception; and so I ask you now to put emphasis on this idea of the moral order of the universe, the moral character of God, in which we have the largest scope for proof, not only of God's existence, but of his personality."

He started suddenly, and quickly and somewhat excitedly said: "Now I see where you are going in your argument. I see whereunto all this tends. When you asked me, a little while since, about my view of the character of God, I was a little surprised, and thought you were getting away from the line you had proposed. But, I see you are like a lawyer, laying the foundation, in a series of cross-questions, for the evidence he is going by-and-by to produce. You are going to argue that the right can have a standard only in a personal God, as you did about 'the true' in the mental realm; and then, that a personal God, rather than an impersonal principle,

would be likely to interfere in the history of the world, and to thrust in a new force ; that he would be likely to interfere with due process of law under which men had done the wrong, by sending his Son, then miracles, then a revelation, then the whole religion of Christianity, as the legitimate outcome of a personal God who is set on rescuing men out of the grip of the wrong—in other words, you are going to argue your Christian scheme of things, and your Christian doctrine of ‘salvation.’”

“Precisely so,” I said, “I concealed nothing. I have tried to get at what of truth you conceded about God, so as to get a common basis from which to start. What you conceded involved a good deal that you did not quite see ; simply because you had not thought it through. I had not the slightest idea of entrapping you. Which one of the conceded things do you want to take back ? We set out by your telling me what you believed ; and when I asked if the God in whom you believed was personal or impersonal, you intimated that you were inclined to the latter idea, but that you desired to hear something in favor of God’s personality, so as to confirm your wavering impression. I drew my argument from Spencer’s favorite conception of pure power, and then from your favorite idea of ‘pure thought.’ I want now to present the argument that God must be the Sovereign Right.”

“I beg pardon,” he rejoined. “Go on.”

“There is less need of it, since you already see it, and see a good way beyond it, as to what the conclusion involves. For myself, living as a student of religion, in this moral sphere of things, asking about them ‘what is

right,' these moral convictions are more familiar and more firm than any others I have."

"I can see how it is so," he interrupted, "and what I meant to say is, that they are less familiar to me. I have cared more for the true."

"And yet, Mr. B——, you have by no means in social and business life, been oblivious of the right. You made a very sharp distinction along that line, in judging of men and their doings. You denounced slavery as wrong, intemperance as a crime, and dishonesty as a wickedness. You had praise to give integrity, you applauded generosity, you were unstinted in your admiration of the heroes of the war. It is because in you, as in every man, there is a moral element, a sort of moral judgeship being conferred upon us all, as those 'made in the image of God.' And all this praise and blame would be impossible to you if you were not a free, intelligent, moral, and separate person. On the impersonal principle, on the necessitarian scheme, you could do none of these things; and no more could God recognize right and range himself on its side. Harriet Martineau says, 'I am a creature of necessity. I claim neither merit nor demerit.' Yet, she can blame those who do not take her view of things, and talk about 'morality,' when, on her system, morality or immorality can as little be asserted of a man as of a mountain. You, Mr. B——, though sceptical about a good many things, are a practical man, and do not mean to run a theory into absurdity. You believe that right and wrong are realities, though men sometimes, because fallible, make a mistake about the particular thing which may be before them.

But there *is* a right and a wrong about a thing. And the fact that we are fallible about it just shows the need and the certainty of an infallible mind, the decisions of which are ultimate on all questions of 'the right.' God is right, whoever else is wrong. The 'moral sense' in us all is a fact. If it were a fact that right were such outside of a personal God and by virtue of an impersonal principle, then there could be no sense of what ought to be, but only a sense of what *is*. It would come about that 'whatever is is right,' instead of whatever is ought to be right. No notions are more fixed than those expressed by the word 'ought,' when one says: 'I ought' or 'I ought not' to do that thing, 'to be or not to be that kind of a person.' A universe with wrong in it could not come into being any more than a universe with right in it, under the working of mere impersonal and unconscious forces. There must be somewhere, and so in some primal mind, the perfect sense of the right and the wrong, and for some wise reason, permission for the wrong to do its worst, so that the right may counterwork it. That final, supreme mind, having in it the ultimate standard not only of 'the true' but of 'the right,' must be a personal mind—a personal God."

He said: "Yes, that is good logic if it takes in all the facts. But what if there are immoral facts all about us, for which the theory of a moral God does not account. Here is a sentence from Haeckel's 'History of Creation,' which I transcribed the other day to show you. He says: 'If we contemplate the common life and mutual relations between plants and animals, (men included) we shall find the very opposite of that kindly and social life,

which the goodness of the Creator ought to have prepared for his creatures. We shall find the most embittered struggle of 'all against all.' He is showing that nature is not beneficent, and is arguing against the existence, or at least against the recognition of God."

"I have this to say, that the facts, if they are so, are worse for his theory than mine. He would find all reason for creation and for orderly development in the 'eternal immutable laws of nature,' as he calls them, and which he would make cover everything. Very well, then, either these 'immutable and eternal laws' do, or do not include these disastrous facts of the 'embittered struggle.' If they do not cover the facts, he has simply put some things outside the domain of his 'laws.' His theory is too narrow to account for them; and the things outside his 'laws immutable, necessary and eternal,' are the things in which he must own some other force than law to be at work. He has thus made a place for the very God he denies, to work at least evil and mischief. He is as much obliged to account for these adverse things as I am. And he cannot do it on his theory. I can do it on mine. For these adverse things can be permitted—not under law; for wrong is the unlawful thing, since its unlawfulness makes it wrong. Sin is the unaccountable thing in a universe that is only under law. Sin is the violation of law—a thing impossible save as there is a free agent to do the sinning in a universe over which presides a free moral being, who is supreme and so is a personal God."

"But you are attempting to account for sin!"

"By no means," I said, "I am only showing that we

can conceive of a free moral Governor of the universe, with free moral agents under him, as letting in sin, if he shall see a reason for it, in the results he is to gain thereby. I am showing that sin and righteousness, right and wrong, evil and good, cannot come in under a system of mere law, and that they can come in only through a vastly broad moral scheme of things which an Infinite Person may well be carrying on. I am not accounting for the sin in a sinner, nor for the cruelty in nature; but only showing that none of this is possible under the impersonal idea, and that it can exist only in the realm of personality, and can be justified, if at all, under the sway of a Being who manages the evil so that on the whole the trend of things is toward good results. Even down on his merely natural plane—to say nothing of the moral order of the universe—Haeckel would own that his darling Evolution provides for the welfare of survivors in the ‘embittered struggle;’ that the race of animals is benefited by the loss of those ‘unfittest to survive;’ that the evolution of higher and more complete forms is constantly going on, and that a better progeny comes in to take the place of that which goes out. Right in the narrower, he is certainly wrong in the broader view of the trend. Haeckel and Schopenhauer are in the list of pessimists, but the mass of better thinkers are optimists, as are all believers in a personal God. Over against Haeckel let me quote Lotze. He asks: ‘Is it possible to imagine a Being which, stimulated by the influence of every existing condition in the cosmic course, should with purposeless and blindly working activity, impart to that course ameliorating impulses

by which the thought-going dominion of what is good is established—a Being which cannot distinguish what is good in a good action from what is bad in a bad action, but yet acts as though it could do all this?’ Matthew Arnold has to speak of a power ‘that makes for righteousness.’ The conviction is certainly gaining ground among men that there is a moral goal toward which is the grand trend of things; that the adverse facts are simply the narrow eddy near the shore which owes its existence to the superior fact that the great body of water in the channel, the real river, is running down steadily toward the sea. As one of the proofs of a future life is found in the fact that the disorders of this life call for another to set them right, so the faults and flaws of the present scheme of things, permissible only by God, call for him to manage them in their outcome. So that, by the orderliness of all orderly things, and also by the apparent and limited disorders of the world, we are led to take refuge in the idea of a wise, free, moral Being, sovereign in the realm of right—a personal God.”

I had spoken these sentences slowly. He had jotted down “catch words” on his paper. When I ceased, he was silent a little time and then said :

“I must think it all over. I had expected a very different argument from you on the existence of a God. I did not exactly doubt, but I was misty in my views. I think I did not fully take in the difference between the idea of a personal God and that of an impersonal God. The former view has clearly the better of the argument. It is at once a simpler and a vastly broader view. Where I said God in my former discussions, I certainly did not



emphasize his personality, even if I meant anything more than a pervasive, impersonal principle. I am prepared to say the word God now with a firmness of tone I have never used before. But I see what is coming. You are going to press the argument that such a God, on the side of the right as against the wrong, has sent Jesus Christ, a supernatural person with supernatural miracles; and then will follow atonement and regeneration, etc., all of them along that same line of intervention."

I said: "It does not follow from the argument thus far, that he *has* done so. But only this, that the way is open for him to do that thing; that there is nothing, *a priori*, to show that he has not done so, and that he might be expected, as one who 'makes for righteousness' to do so."

Mr. B—— was weary. The hour had gone swiftly in the discussion of which the above is only an outline.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE EXISTENCE OF THE SOUL.

CALLING on Mr. B—— at the appointed time, I was not surprised to see certain books on the library table. He referred to the fact, as soon as the usual friendly greeting and inquiries were exchanged. There was a copy of Mr. Fiske's "Cosmic Philosophy" and of his "Idea of God," a copy of Spencer's "Data of Ethics," and "First Principles," also a wide-open review, containing an article in which copious extracts were made from the works of Haeckel. He said he had been trying to see for himself whether Spencer had put as much emphasis as I had represented him as doing upon the idea of God as a Power, at the expense of Thought; also, whether Mr. Fiske, who uses far more frequently the word "God" than does Spencer, was really, as I had stated, to be classed among those who hold the word but drop out its meaning. He spoke of writers like those he had named as "authorities" on the matter. But I begged him to remember that these men he had quoted were hardly accepted as "authorities" on the theistic argument; that geologists would not be willing to call a man, however eminent in other departments, an "authority" in their own department, nor should theologians be expected to do it; that we had names of eminence such as Calderwood, in his "Philosophy of the Infinite," Janet, in his "Final Causes," among those abroad;

while Harris, in his "Philosophical Basis of Theism," Diman, in his "Theistic Argument," and Fisher, in his "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," together with McCosh, in his "Intuitions," and Porter, in his "Moral Science," were men thoroughly at home on the theistic question, which is a part of the religion they profess. He demurred a little, saying that those he had named were eminent men. To this I responded, owning their eminence in letters, but insisting that the profession of literature and that of religion were two things, and that eminence in the one did not make a man's opinions at all an "authority" in the other. I called his attention to the fact that whereas a few years ago, so many purely literary men ignored religious inquiries, to-day the literary side of religion was deemed of such importance that the danger was lest literary writing should with some persons pass for religious; that a man might be strong in the one line and a "light-weight" in the other, and that one would be sure to judge unwisely who put literary criticism in the place of moral and religious conviction.

I said that we must be about our work for the day. "You were," I continued, "to tell me what you believed about the human soul." He said quickly, "Are you through with the argument for a personal God?" "No; but I can best present the additional argument by inquiring about the soul of man which the Scriptures say is "made in the image of God," and therefore will be most likely to discover to us what God himself is in this matter of personality. If man is essentially a spirit, then, by the study of how he is made, we can surely tell

something of God his maker, who is also a 'spirit.' And therefore it is that I want you to tell me, whether you believe in a personal immortality for the soul of man."

He answered by quoting the fifth stanza of Wordsworth's "Ode on Immortality," laying especial emphasis on the lines—

"The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath elsewhere had its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our home."

He said: "Wordsworth is called a Christian poet, but had he known the theory of Buddhism, he could hardly have put it into finer lines. The poem leaves the impression that the soul lived before, rose upon the surface of a life hardly personal,—as a bubble from the water floats on the surface of the river,—that, after a little, it is resolved back into the divine ocean of being whence it rose. Is not that a finely poetic thought, whether we accept its truthfulness or not?"

I said: "The Buddhistic conception is, to me, too horrible to be poetic. All conscious existence is not real, but only the bubble dancing on the wave, soon to vanish into nothingness, and the stream itself is to vanish also, and all sense and reason for the race of man is also to fall into nothingness and God himself to pass in the end into extinction. This is the saddest of all the creeds that the world ever saw. No, no. The human soul dowered

at its creation with personal capacities, and which can forever set itself on the side of the good, which was rescued, according to the Christian system, by the most amazing self-sacrifice on the part of God himself, which is able to enter into the divine plans and so to become a factor in God's eternal triumph over sin, and a participant in the heaven where goodness is to be eternally enthroned—this is a conception that fills the world with meaning and makes life grand and 'worth living,' a conception with such length and breadth and depth and height, that it has inspired the song of the foremost singers of the world. No, I cannot accept Buddhism as having anything poetic in it; even if some, with you, claim that the 'Ode on Immortality' looks that way. But it is by no means necessary to so understand Wordsworth. Indeed, a score of passages in his 'Excursion' look in just the opposite direction, and the mellow light of religion falls over all the pastoral scenes where he loves to linger."

He only said: "The whole matter of a soul is to me indefinite. I believe we have it; but it seems more like an appendage that we shall carry when we go than like a part of ourselves. If you would go over the argument for the existence of the soul, I should be at least more impressed with the fact, even if I did not believe it any more firmly than I do now."

I said: "You are weary to-day. Let me do the most of the talking. I will put myself in the position of an inquirer. I will ask and I will answer my own inquiries. I will think out aloud, if you desire me so to do. Let me start where a sceptic would begin, as if doubtful

about the existence of the human soul, and then proceed from point to point in the proof."

"I would be delighted to have you do just that."

"Well," I said, "let me begin by asking myself this question. Have I a soul? I know I have a body. I see it, feel it, and each of my five senses bears me witness that I have a body. But is there anything else about me, apart from the sensations of this bodily organization? As I ponder this question of a soul, I find myself asking, what this is in me or of me, that is pondering the question, that is thinking about the matter? What is this self that is asking self certain things? What is this that cares, if indeed, I care about knowing; and what is it that wants to know and will know, if I can only find out, whether I have a soul? What is this 'I' that thinks, reasons, is interested, has fears when I fear, has hopes when I hope,—what is it that does all these things? At every point of my inquiry the 'I' comes in. It is the 'I' that is assumed, as well as the 'I' that asks these questions. This 'I' thinks and feels and hopes and fears and reasons and judges and decides. I must have some name for what does all these things. Until I can get a better name for that part of me which does all this, let me call it 'soul.'"

"But how do I know that this soul is not my body acting in another way? Because this body of mine and this soul of mine have absolutely no one quality in common. To the body belong such qualities as hardness and softness, as color and weight and form. To the soul belong such unlike things as thought and feeling and memory and judgment and reason and conscience and

will. By scales I can weigh the one : there are so many ounces and pounds. Or, I can measure it : there are so many pints and gallons of fluid. Not by ounces or pecks, not by colors or shapes, can I estimate thought. I cannot put conscience into pints, nor reason into cubic feet. There is no common standard of measurement. I find simply two parallel existences, but they are, so far as I can judge by the differing qualities that belong to each, entirely unlike in essence and in kind. But it may be asked whether in some way that we cannot understand they may not be the same substance. If, indeed, there were any one factor common to both, the question would be pertinent. But in the absence of such a unit, it is absurd to attempt to found unity on dissimilarity and oneness on opposition. Then, too, why should one want to make them alike, when they are obviously and inherently different? In that case, too, the appeal would be to the body itself,—and the ‘I’ in me which thinks, does not respond to the sentiment that this ‘I’ is the body. Or, if the appeal be to the soul, that does not say that the ‘I’ is the body. As well try to make it out that all is soul, and the body a nonentity, as, that all is body and the soul a nonentity. Let me hold to both as ultimate facts. Body and soul are parallel and related facts, and are therefore not identical. Nor can thought be, as some have suggested, a secretion of the brain, as bile is of the liver. For bile from the liver can be cut into parts and put into scales, and can be weighed by physical weights, while thought refuses to go into the scales and cannot be reckoned by grains and penny-weights. You can put the bile into measuring glasses, heat

it in a retort, and apply to it all physical tests for color and quantity and quality, but none of these things can you do with thought. Thought is *sui generis*. It will not subject itself to being estimated by scruples and drams and ounces. You are dealing with unlike things."

He interrupted me to ask: "Are you as certain of the existence of the soul as of the body?"

"More so. For the qualities of the body are very few and very easily named. The list of those belonging to the soul is far longer. Then, too, the basis of knowledge concerning both body and mind is in the mind, rather than in the body. It is not the body that knows the mind, but the mind knows all that is known both of the body and the mind. It uses the physical organism when it would know, as a master uses a slave. And, further yet; we are more certain of the knowing soul than of the known body. The 'I' which is the soul, knows itself as knowing, in all it ever knows. There may be sometimes a mistake about material things,—we have found out afterward that an object was not what it seemed to be. But we were not deceived as to the fact of our thinking about it. The 'I' that does the thinking was there, even when we were mistaken about the thing we thought we saw. So that states of mind are the most certain of anything we know. And thus our certainty of the existence of mind is greater than that we can ever have of the existence of matter,—even of the organized matter which makes up our bodies.

"I am, in addition to this, conscious that this soul of mine is a reasoning soul. I am reasoning now. To reason is to ask for the truth, and it involves the idea of the



absolute truth somewhere and in some one being. That being is God. My faculties of reasoning are personal. Another man has memory, reason and will; but they are his, as mine are mine, as God's are God's. All such faculties cannot be a protoplasmic mass of general mind. They are personal faculties, individual qualities. They belong to separately organized existences; to persons responsible before the grand 'mental law of the true and the false,' and who are in duty bound to know the truth if they can. If, as all agree, thinking involves a thinker, then the 'I' is a real and personal being. And the man who thinks can only think on the mental plane, and under the mental law of 'the true and the false;' and every such exercise involves the idea of a standard mind in which the perception of the true is perfect. It follows that every act of thinking involves, consciously or unconsciously, the idea of another being who can also say 'I' when speaking of himself. Every glance of eye or bending downward of the ear, and every word that trembles on the lip at the last analysis, is the inquiry for a cause; and so, recognized or unrecognized, is an inquiry for the First Cause. We can see and feel and know that there is in the universe about us what has been called 'an intellectual order of things.' Things are adjusted to thought. They provoke it. We ask for the thought in the things. Things are correlated to the truth concerning them; and these minds are made up so as to believe that there is, somehow, a true intellectual order in them—*i. e.*, a reason for them, a purpose and plan in them. They are not 'fortuitous atoms' happening to be as they are. There are method and mind back of their order; there is



truth about them. But we men never *make* a truth. It *is* true. It accords with a standard of truth that exists in some mind, for we never create truth. We make nothing true. We simply, by our mental powers, find it to be such. We accept the ready-made truth about things; and we do our work intellectually, by recognizing the facts as they are. In knowing this soul of mine to be a reasoning soul, I know it is at work in a world of thought to which, as I am correlated, so God must be correlated. He too must be, as I am, a personal thinker, working out his ends by personal thought and will."

He interrupted me to say: "How then, do you make any place for mistake and error in reasoning?"

I answered: "Do you admit that error is real?"

"Certainly," he said.

"But," I responded, "error can only be a fact if there is any absolute truth with which, as a standard it is compared and found not to agree. Now all human reasoning being liable to error, while at the same time we feel that the knowing soul was made to know, there starts up instantly and inevitably the conviction that there must be somewhere a being free from mistake, whose knowledge is perfect. Perfect thought, which is the ideal of all thinking in a personal human soul, demands an actually perfect thinker in a personal God. So that human errors in thinking, as well as all fair and correct reasonings, demand one who can and does know all, and whose thought is pure thought. If, as some one has said, 'there must be a judge to constitute an error,' then it is just as true that there must be a judge to constitute a truth.

“But,” I continued, “the moral argument for the personality, both of the soul and of God, is even stronger. Have I, in this soul of mine, not only a reasoning soul, but a moral soul? Is there in me a moral sense as well as a reasoning faculty? Is there in this soul of mine a consciousness of the ‘law of the right and the wrong’? Do I ever, even in one case, draw the distinction between the two? In answering let me ask what this is in my soul that is always saying ‘I ought’ and ‘I ought not.’ My own volition does not create this law. I find it existing. It seems to be a part of the scheme of things; for I am always appealing to it in other men. I seem to be born into this system of the universe, exactly as my body is born into the system of physical facts and laws. I did not make the law of gravity in the physical realm, nor the law of the true in the intellectual realm; no more do I make the law of ‘the right and the wrong’ in the moral realm. I have faculties by which I recognize and use these things and laws, in these unlike but parallel realms. Moreover, this moral realm has a kind of supremacy. For there may be a question of ‘the right’ in the using of my hand and foot and eye and ear. So that moral uses are the grandest uses, and moral ends ultimate ends, for this soul of mine.

“Now all, except one small class of infidel pessimistic thinkers, own, some gladly, some reluctantly, that there is a ‘moral order in the universe.’ Even Mr. Spencer, the apostle of ‘Power,’ admits as Arnold does, that there is a ‘power that makes for righteousness.’ It is an admission, as his critics have declared a hundred times, he should not have made on his system. It is all that saves

him from blank pessimism. So far as I know, the boldest scepticism leaves the human conscience, the 'sense of the right and the wrong,' an undisputed fact. Sceptics may weaken it by divorcing it from God; they may account for it by heredity or by whatsoever other theory they may select,—one of them about as good, or rather about as bad as the other. But there the fact stands. The 'I' when I say 'I ought' is a personal soul acting in the presence of moral law and under the pressure of the highest kind of responsibility.

"It is obvious at a glance, that the theory of a personal God who is perfect judge in the domain of right agrees best with this moral order of things. Further, that the sense of right, or 'righteousness,' as a principle in the soul, is best supported by the conception of a personal God,—an eternally Holy One. The idea gets to have tremendous weight, the conviction an overmastering power, when a man really takes it into his soul. This idea of a Holy God on the side of right, and who is the foe evermore of 'the wrong,' is the grandest possible aid to one who would be helped in righteousness. And further yet; this idea of a personal God, a very sovereign in righteousness, is correlated with all those moral ends which thoughtful men find in the world. There is a moral meaning—or else there is something appalling in the constitution of things. It is this horrible shudder which has kept so many men from atheism. It is a healthful shudder. It is nature's own recoil. We come back to our own souls and call up again the conviction that right is real; that this soul is moral, and is related to the moral realm of things; the very constitu-

tion of the soul requiring a personal and righteous God."

He said: "I think that must be so. But I never gave that idea of the moral sense in the soul much force before. I see I ought to have done it." "There!" he added, instantly, "I have used your word 'I ought,' and I have made it also my own."

He continued, after a moment's pause: "I have one objection to your argument about a moral purpose; and it comes with a good deal of force to a sick man like myself. Last night I pondered it in this wise. I thought that if there was really a good God why did he allow me to suffer so?" He looked up pitifully, and I could hardly restrain my tears. "Life seems to me here, confined to this room, and never, as they say, to go out of my house again,—life and health also are surely good things; and a good God could so easily give them to me now if he would."

I could not reply for a few moments. We both sat in silence. At length I said: "My dear sir, I feel too well the force of your objection. It comes home to every sufferer. It comes up to some minds at every spectacle of sorrow. I admit its force. But what if it were proved that there was no God and no moral trend of things? Would that be an alleviation to you?"

"Oh no," he said, "that would make hopelessness now and hereafter to be the lot of man. It is hard enough as it is without that." He checked himself, and then added as if he was surprised at what he had said: "I am not talking much like the sceptic and infidel that some people think I am. I have been wont to talk

against all ideas of God and religion. But in the light of my recent thinking, I feel a recoil against a universe without some head, without a God. For perhaps *he* can account for these facts so sad and terrible, if we cannot."

I could not repress some astonishment at his words, so unlike any he had previously employed. I said: "You heard my admission just now, that there are things which at first view do not seem, when taken all alone, to be kindly and beneficent. They appear to be, if not cruel, at least blind and unfeeling. But we must remember that they are parts of a whole system. The motion of a wheel in a piece of mechanism may be the very opposite of that which, as a whole, the machine exhibits—the backward motion best contributing to the forward result. To your eye only on its backward motion the piston-rod in the locomotive would seem to work in the wrong way. Your eye on the forward motion would see only the antagonism of the backward motion, and the result would be *nil*. But by the crank connection and its attachment to the moving wheels, both motions contribute equally to the speed of the engine. When you see both the general result and the forward motion of the piston, you can well believe that the skilled mechanic has to do with devising the backward motion, and uses it in some wise way in his masterpiece.

"Further, it is a discipline to have to do our moral work amid some moral difficulties. As in the department of the mental world, it trains the intellect to search out the truth, because there is error, so in the

moral world there is enough to discipline us in what is dark and strange. We must learn to believe and trust where we cannot fully see. What, my dear Mr. B——, if this very sickness has in it a wise purpose? Surely you are beginning to see some things in new lights, and this is a kind of moral compensation for these hours of lonely suffering."

He said: "You have not yet gotten to the idea of the immortality of the soul." But I saw that while his mind was singularly keen, and he had followed closely my argument, physical weariness had come to him. I said: "The soul's immortality" shall be our next theme of discussion. And I took my leave.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SOUL'S IMMORTALITY.

EVIDENTLY Mr. B—— was not so strong as at my former visit; but he had, as he said, anticipated my coming, for he remarked that our last interview was fresh in his mind, and had given him food for thought during the week just ending.

“I am curious to know in what shape you are going to put the argument for the immortality of the soul,” he said.

“Let me begin where I left off,” I replied. “I had been following out my question, ‘have I a soul?’ I had shown that every quality of that part of man that thinks and feels and loves and hates and judges of ‘the true’ and feels obligated by ‘the right,’ is exactly unlike those qualities which belong to the body; that this soul which does these things is a part of us of which we are more sure than we are of the body; is of higher rank; is a reasoning soul doing its intellectual work on the plane of things where ‘the true’ is the fundamental law—a law we do not make, but find made for us when we come into being; a law that makes necessary a standard mind in which reside omniscience and just reason, and this mind is God. All mind of which we know anything is personal, each quality in it being the attribute of an individual. And the correlative truth of personality in man is personality in God.”



I said also "that I had argued, likewise, that the soul was a moral soul—was under the law of 'the right and the wrong;' that there were no deeper convictions than these moral ones, even though men by no means always obeyed them; that these personal convictions were in turn correlated to a 'moral order of things' in the universe about us, and to the personal moral God who was sovereign in the realm of righteousness."

He interrupted me to say: "You know that I have put stress hitherto upon the idea of the soul as thought and upon God as pure thought. Your argument convinced me at the time, that thought demands for its cause a personal thinker, and that the ultimate thinker is a personal God. But the moral argument did not, at our last interview, impress me so strongly, and yet as I have thought it over, it has had more and more weight with me. It is getting," he added, after a moment, "it is getting to seem a very serious thing for a man to be in this moral realm with a personal God who is the perfect judge of the right."

I said: "My argument for the soul's immortality shall be along this last line of thought which you have suggested. I will ask myself the question: 'Is this soul of mine—this reasoning soul—this moral soul of mine,—also an immortal soul?' The chief reason is indeed the moral reason; but other reasons for believing in an immortal soul might be given. It would be possible to urge—(1) The fact that the soul, superior to the body in kind, ought to exist after the body is gone. By almost incredible labor, one great builder projected and constructed the pyramid of Cheops, which has endured



thousands of years and will last perhaps while the world may stand. Is the maker's existence limited to the three score and ten years he spent on earth? Is his merely material work greater than himself—the thing he made greater than its maker? It is so unless the soul lives after death? (2) This soul of mine lives now. It is reasonable to believe that it will continue to live on until something is encountered superior to itself that will destroy it. Death cannot do it; since we experience, in the destruction and renewal of our bodies during our lifetime, changes vastly greater than death, and those changes do not destroy the soul. (3) The present state of the soul seems to be only the beginning in a course of knowledge. We see the flowers of the field going on unto perfection. Where they have gained it, and there is nothing more for the flower to be or to do, it perishes. When shall this soul of mine find that limit, so that its perfection is gained beyond which it has nothing more to know or to be or to do? When is further development impossible for this mind? *Never.* Never do you and I reach that place. We are going, then, you and I, as thinking persons, right on into this eternity, nor do we as separate souls cease at the remotest period to think and feel and know. It will be incessant duration, not of abstract existence, but of conscious thought and of the conscious thinker."

As I looked up, I saw that his eyes were fixed intently on me; and yet he seemed not to see me, but to be looking on beyond me. After a moment, he said:

"That is an overpowering reflection. There is no getting out of the sphere of thought."

"But," I continued, "these three things just named, while their trend is direct, do not mean so much to me as does the argument from our moral being and moral position and moral responsibility. We are in an unending moral system of things, and we are made indispensable factors in it. Given a conscience, and an act in view of it, and its relations are the widest conceivable. That moral act runs up Godward, and God exercises upon it his moral nature, and he judges of it as right or as wrong. It is a factor in the final account which all just thinking declares a necessity at the end of human probation on earth. It may influence, as an act, other men. The influence of some single acts goes over whole generations, and its moral good or harm can only be computed in the last great day of human existence on earth. Shall the soul's doings last longer than the soul's self? In written human history we can trace an act of good or of ill done by a man in high position, through a thousand years. Nay, there was an act done in Eden, far back by the headwaters of human history, that has not only shaped the course, but colored every drop of the flowing stream of our humanity. But the unwritten history of every human soul has its acts that affect the personal life of both self and others, moulding it and making it what it is in all the future of the soul's existence. And with reference to one's own moral action, the results can never be felt at the moment of acting. The soul is itself made stronger in the right or stronger in the wrong. And this strength or weakness in the right shows itself in the next action, and then in the next and so on evermore. Find a place where the process shall terminate, if you

can. Each moral act demands a result in the next moment. It requires then that next moment in which to get that result. If a part of the penalty of my sinning is greater disposition to sin, there must be a next moment in which that disposition to sin shall work itself out. Penalty demands not only a punishment, but a future time for the punishment. The moral act of to-day demands a to-morrow in which its consequences shall have room. The to-day of my moral life demands the to-morrow of eternity for its issuing result. Moral action once started is immortal in results and so carries with it as a necessity the immortality of the moral actor. And therefore we believe in the immortality of God and in the immortality of man. They are eternally moral actors in an unending moral universe!"

He appeared a good deal impressed with these considerations. I had spoken slowly with frequent pauses. He had taken quite full notes. And now we were sitting there a few moments in silence.

At length he said: "I cannot reply to your argument; but it is a pretty bad case for a man who has ever done wrong."

"But," I replied, "just here comes into view another question. It is this: What may an Eternal God be considered as likely to do for these immortal souls, who are, so many of them, utterly out of the way, and who have all of them done wrong? It seems to me that when I see the evils of the world for which, not God, but man is responsible, I can only ask whether this kindly God has come to us men with any moral intervention. I claim the probability—the immense probability—of moral in-

tervention; the probability that he will, if it can be done, thrust in somewhere and somehow a new force—a power that shall intervene; a new agency, possibly a new agent. The great moral law, of results from good and from ill doing, must still have its place and play. But God may have something to introduce at the fit moment that shall start human history in a new cycle, and a human soul that has done wrong in a new career of doing right. I claim that all men must feel that this intervention was not only possible but probable; that hence have come the thousand attempts at religion—composite attempts in which the better reason has called for moral relief and the evil passion in men has called for debasing rites and doctrines. So that every religion in the world, with one exception, has over against its downward an upward tendency—the outlook and longing for intervention. Moral intervention is the cry of man's mistakes, as well as the prayer of his religions. I feel the need of it. And you, Mr. B——, in your words just now—about 'a man who has done wrong being in a hard case'—you feel it as well. Here we are with signs of moral disorder all about us, in what is ideally a universe of moral order. Sin is in us and error all about us, and every man in danger of being eternally involved in his own sins and mistakes. Surely there is need of God's moral intervention. And this means a supernatural intervention—a supernatural Saviour, a supernatural gospel for man's rescue and mental and moral salvation. It is the immense probability that God would come to the moral rescue of these morally immortal souls that I want you to consider. The proof that

he has actually done it we may take up in our next interview. But everything is to be considered from the moral standpoint, the point of the religion of the Bible as a moral intervention. It is not a merely intellectual question at any point of the inquiry. Moral ends are to be intellectually considered, and everything in and about the religion of the Bible is to be judged of in the light of the fact that we are morally immortal, and are in a system of things wherein this idea is never for a moment to be out of view. Such a God, himself a spirit, doing his moral work in the closest possible connection with each man, who is also in turn a spirit, and both of them existing forever, and in moral touch with each other, is the thought I want to leave with you now."

I said: "We have gotten on far enough to warrant one thing. I would like to ask, before I go, of this God, of whom and in whose presence we have been talking, that he will help us both to see the truth about these things. It is only fair to do this. If a very superior intelligence from the other world were here, or even a very superior man were present, we would ask his aid in our investigations. I propose that our future interviews should conclude with prayer.

He sat silent. There was a displeased look on his face. It passed in a few moments. He then said: "I have no objection that you should pray." I asked God's blessing in a few words. He urged me not to fail in calling the next week, and I took my leave of him.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DIVINE INTERVENTION.

MR. B—— was so eager to begin our conversation at the next call, that he could hardly wait to answer my inquiries about his health. He said, quite abruptly :  
“ I don’t see why God needed to have a son.”

At the first moment it was not quite evident to me why he made so singular a remark. But presently the connection in his mind occurred to me. He was evidently conceding the need and the fact of intervention, but not ready to admit, without some mental objection, that this had been done by Jesus Christ as Son of God. While I was getting at his mental position as indicated by his question, he repeated the words in a tone almost of irritation :

“ I don’t see why God needed to have a son.”

I replied by asking, “ if it was necessary for us to be told of all the reasons that influenced God before he should act in any matter ? Was God obliged to consult you or me or any other being, angelic, demoniac, or human, and square his doings with the ideas of any of his creatures in such a case ? ”

“ Oh, no ; I suppose not, so far as he himself is concerned,” he said ; “ but still it is a fair question whether we could not get on without that thing if indeed it be a fact. I have been asking myself if the illumination of a man’s own faculties would not be enough without any

of this moral machinery. Perhaps," he added, "I have a little Quaker blood in my veins, and I have always thought that, if there were a God, his relation might, as the Quakers say, be 'borne in upon the soul' by way of personal illumination to every man who lives."

He smiled as he spoke, and it was clear to me that he was less expressing his belief than raising an objection to what he saw he would probably be obliged to admit.

I asked him "if he would claim that this enlightenment comes to every man by virtue of his natural spiritual faculties, or does it come by a special divine visitation?"

He said: "What have you to urge against the view that this illumination comes to all men by natural endowment?"

"I would only say what you have said repeatedly in these interviews—viz., that man's most unfortunate things are his religions. And that, if this view is correct, we have in man's religions that which is always and everywhere true, no matter how absurd, no matter how contradictory, no matter how heathenish and abominable. These 'terrible religions' are all the result of 'natural enlightenment.' If these are the light, what must the darkness be? A man who has his own little private revelation is now called a 'crank;' or, if a very high religious official, we call him a 'Pope.' What a ridiculously variant thing this spiritual faculty in man appears to be. It lets men down to grovel in every form of error from the Fetichism which makes a god of a bit of stone to the other extreme of Pantheism which, by making everything a god, leaves us no God at all. This 'spiritual faculty in man' so much lauded as to exclude,



for some the need of any other help, has allowed and required the worship of sun, moon and stars, Grecian statue, and huge Patagonian idol, the embodiment of all ugliness. It leads men to differ on every religious doctrine that can be named, and to differ diametrically. It is, certainly, judging from its fruits, about the most depraved thing in us. As you get it everywhere among men, it is man's most useless endowment considered as his sufficient guide. We Christians claim the faculty to be a failure as a guide, but a success as a capacity—a capacity to be laid hold of and rectified—and thereby only to be made noble and useful. It needs outside intervention, and then it no more exists as a mere want, but as a manly faculty divinely restored to pristine place and power. It is a part of us that has met with a mishap. It is a magnet that has lost its polarity. It is a mechanism that is disabled and liable to work exactly contrary to the original intention. It is a disordered faculty and works as often mischief as good. It is a watch, made to keep time indeed, but as often wrong as right. On a jeweler's frame, one may see hanging dozens of these watches. The express use of a watch is to keep correct time. But no two of these dozens of watches keep the same time, though they are all at work at the problem of timekeeping. Not one of them keeps standard time, though it keeps ticking as if it did. They are all, however, intended as pieces of mechanism, to measure rightly the hours; but each one of them must be repaired, then wound, then regulated, then set by standard time. These watches need the watchmaker's hand. They are not going to be perfect watches through any accident, nor to



develop into such, in some other 'eon.' They are in need of an outside interference. As they hang there in the jeweler's frame, about all you can say concerning these professed 'time-keepers' is that they have a capacity, through their mechanism, for keeping time, and can be repaired, duly wound, regulated and set; and when that is done their confusing diversity which makes it well-nigh impossible that any of them should ever be right, will have ceased. Yes; 'our moral spiritual faculties,' made to guide us, as a watch is made to keep time, have started out on their own course, and the consequences are most deplorable. With these results, what is this 'natural illumination of every man' worth as a sovereign guide in religion? Every man must have it, according to the theory, for it is his natural endowment; and it is responsible for all man's aberrations. If man is unfallen, as some say, what is this faculty worth? If he has fallen, then the result is what we see in man's horrible 'illusions.' The answer to your question about this 'illumination of nature as enough,' is just your own arraignment, so often made, man's religions."

"Yes," he said, "I admit it all. You meet me on my own ground. I will go farther than you in denouncing the absurdity and even the wickedness of man's religious systems. All the talk about 'worshiping truly and sincerely toward whatever name one may use, be it Brahma, Pan or Lord,' is maudlin, as if most of man's religions had not been among his worst crimes! I am almost ready to call the men who talk in this way aiders and abettors of criminality. As for trying to find good in these criminal religions, it seemed to me like trying to

‘extract sunbeams from cucumbers.’ I think, in view of the results, that we must give up the theory of a natural illumination. But what have you to say about the other theory—viz., that God’s Holy Spirit illuminates every man?”

“Simply this,” I replied, “that all which has been urged against the other view is equally valid against this idea of supernatural illumination for every member of the race. But you must remember that this view admits a supernatural intervention. Some one comes to men personally on this theory. And the consideration of it, only for a moment, shows that those who adopt it allow the possibility of intervention in addition to our natural faculties in some way. Indeed, we Christians accept the fact of an illumination, which you called a ‘Quaker doctrine.’ We believe that God’s Holy Spirit, in connection with the gospel of our Lord, is especially given to some of the race. It is one kind of intervention, depending upon what, we think, is the intervention which covers all forms of special manifestation to men. However, light is by no means man’s chief need. For all men know better than they do. Truth is needed, but there is needed an authoritative truth teller. There would seem to be call not only for divine wisdom to interfere in the ‘one way,’ but to give to men the ‘One Name.’”

He hastened to remark, “Well, if we must have an intervention—and, I think, there is call for one—why are we shut up to this particular one of Christ’s religion?”

I said: “Would you seriously think of considering for one moment any other religion? You must recall the

thing in which we agreed, in an earlier conversation, that no other religion proposes to *do* anything for men. It is this, or it is no religion, with an intervention." He did not reply, and so I continued: "Try and imagine one better than Christianity; one that is able to meet more completely the case as it is now opening before us."

He spoke slowly, but he said at length: "I think I should put the interference with the bad course of things at the outset of history. Somehow the bad effect of sin got in. And if we accept the biblical Adam and Eve account of it, then why not have had the good fact start also at that point? Why not have God's Son—if we accept the Christian's claims for him—appear as the Restorer, and start a development in the race that should be an offset at the very beginning of things; so that a principle of right moral development should work itself out along the whole course of man's history on earth? I think I could the easier accept it as a development."

"Thank you," I hastened to reply. "You have described just the thing that has been done, with only one necessary historic variation. The normal fact was put into the course of development at the first instant after the abnormal fact of sin. The primal promise came hard after the primal transgression; the good leaven instantly went into the mass. As soon as evil began to work, it began to be checkmated by a new element divinely thrust into human history. Of course, you could not have it historically true that Jesus should be born of the Virgin Mary in the garden of Eden. But the first child was doubtless hailed by the first pair as the one in whom the promise of intervention was to be fulfilled. But it was

not *that* one of 'the seed of the woman' who was to do it. The historic incarnation of the idea could, as now we see it, better come farther on in human history; but the idea of intervention worked itself in, and from that hour began a development which culminated only when the ripest hour of the world's history allowed the predicted Christ to be humanly born. The Eden idea was of One to come who should 'bruise the serpent's' head that had 'bitten the heel,' and so hindered man's holy walking. The germinal idea gradually unfolded. It developed through Abel's sacrificial altar, through the family worship of the patriarchal period. It came out in the 'ladder' and the 'wrestling angel,' and in the predictions of the dying Jacob. All the 'youthful world's gray fathers' had it as the one article of their simple but comprehensive creed. It penetrated all the beliefs of the old nations, each of which bears traces of the original faith in the one God. It was a springing seed from the racial traditions come down from Eden. It was a lingering echo of a far-off time. It was a reappearance of the truth which God would not allow to be altogether lost. It was an especial heritage of the line of men which was the ancestral line of the Hebrew nation. Then came the one only ritual God ever ordained—the Mosaic; a ritual that developed immensely the conception; a ritual that furnished the religious nomenclature for all these Christian centuries; a ritual that in every rite was a prophetic object lesson. Each great seer or singer, historian or philosopher, broadens the conception among the chosen race. And at length a nation, most receptive of moral ideas of any in those olden times, have it for their one great hope that the

Messiah will soon appear. And in certain directions the heathen nations of those ages helped on the ripening of the world's hour as well. They contributed, not in any voluntariness, but providentially, to the result. Their failures in religion were an education as to the need of a special intervention from on high. Their mistakes were overruled, and became an element that worked into the plan; so that when the 'fullness of times' was come, and the Christ should appear, he was the 'Desire of all nations.' It was through four thousand slowly moving years, the development of the good over against the development of the bad. And at the first available moment, the historical Christ appeared in the place of the prophetic, and the Christ idea of Eden was incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. Had he come a single generation sooner, his work, humanly speaking, must have been a failure. The sending of the Christ was at the earliest practicable moment, as now we see it. The ages of moral evolution from the germinal idea prepared the way for the historic revelation of Christ."

He only said, "I see that you claim the advantages both of development and of sudden historic manifestation, for Christianity."

I proposed that the argument from prophecy should come in later, and that the plan of discussion I had outlined should be followed.

I said: "We have seen the need of something outside of man to help him, and have seen also that man's chief capacity was that of trust in something beyond his own personal knowledge in any department of inquiry. And now the next step in the argument is this, viz., to ask

whether this power from without must not be that of a person. I called your attention," I said, "to that which is meant when we ascribe personality to God ; that he is no vague essence, like the intangible ether which our scientists hold must be diffused through the interstellar spaces, but a personal being, with a mind, a soul, a will ; that he is a moral actor. And we saw too, what is meant by saying that man is a personal being, and not a mere bubble on the surface of the sea of mental and moral protoplasmic existence. He is a distinct, moral and responsible actor amid moral facts and forces. The point I now urge is that the rescue of man must, in the same way, come through a person. Sin is not an abstraction ; it can only be committed by a person. The one against whom it is committed is also a person. The one committing sin is the sinner, who starts a moral force in a wrong direction, which goes on repeating itself. When once a sin is committed it is beyond the sinner's power to arrest this active force. No repentance can do it. No reformation can do it. The mischief goes right on, in spite of all protest. The tears of the contrite spendthrift do not restore the wasted fortune. The regrets of the penitent son whose misdeeds sent a father broken hearted to an untimely grave, do not restore that father's life, much less do they cancel the sin against God. Whoever else is sinned against, God is always the one against whom the offense is greatest. Even if he be forgotten by the evil-doer, the sin is not lessened, but increased. Why should a man forget the God to whom he is bound every moment by obligations far stronger than all that can possibly elsewhere bind him ? The way of hindering the



penal results—if indeed there be any way—will come most likely through a person. The restoration to right relations—and every human soul in its best moments feels the need of restoration—will be through a restorer. Plato, looking mainly on the intellectual side, said that our chief need was a divine Man coming down from heaven. Somehow in spite of all deflection by wrongdoing, the most constant traditions of the human race have looked on to the appearance of a phenomenal person. Both Tacitus and Suetonius, as you will recall in the well-known passages, speak of the world-wide expectation, nourished by the entire trend of prophetic teaching, that ‘empire would pass into the hands of men coming from Judea.’ Rescue from waning and unsteady and uncertain superstitions would come through persons—or as the Jews, foremost in moral ideas among the Orientals, held—through a person whom they called by various names, chiefly by the name of ‘the Christ’ or ‘the Messiah.’ But all these hopes of humanity gathered about the idea of personality. Mere truth, while needed, would not suffice. It must be truth competently enforced by a person who could be trusted. As all great moral movements had had personal leadership and had been successful mainly through expenditure of personal force, so it must be here. As of Mahomet and Zoroaster, who put personality into their reform, so here there must be a personal agent. When God shall send deliverance it will be through a Man of men. One of the names Jesus claimed for himself was that of ‘Son of man.’ The ideal of all humanity had received birth in one human being. He showed what man, as man, and apart from sin,

actually was; and hence that name, so peculiar, so significant, the 'Son of Man.' Other good men grew good by degrees. They worked their way upward by treading on their baser selves. They gradually lifted their souls out of their native defects, and after a while grew more or less good. It was a long process of rectification from their faults. But no such process is observed in Jesus. He grows as out of himself. He is like an ever-expanding flower. His is a unique religion, in this respect, that it has for him no penitence about its beginning, no confession and reformation as to its way of progress. He is evidently 'from above,' as he claimed. He comes 'down from heaven.' The impression he makes is unlike that of any other person who has ever lived. He has no self-seeking. He has a consecrated life, which is not ascetic. He is separate from sinners, yet one with men at their marriages and their funerals. In his day thousands hollowed out their cells in the arid limestone hills of eastern Judea and spent life in devotion. But he retired from the world only for a few days; and for the most part he walked in close contact with men in their daily business. In hundreds of positions we find him; but always his robe is stainless. His utterances are simple. His nearer meaning is plain. But his eyes have the far-off gaze as well; and his words look on through the centuries. His utterances are not highly wrought productions suggesting toilsome processes of thought. His words do not smell of the lamp; they come easily, naturally, spontaneously. He is not mystical, yet has the air of one who has a divine instinct. He sees all things in moral connections. They are related to the



great invisible, but most real, moral universe that takes in God and souls. He sees men in the broadest relations. No one ever thought so much of man ; but it is of man as related to God. He is a dogmatist, rather than a logician. He stands amid the greatest truths about time and eternity ; about God and the soul, with a certain firmness of foot. He knows easily where he is. He speaks with an authoritative tone, and yet with a lofty humility before his father God, as one on a mission from him. His reserve in deed and word is almost as wonderful as his disclosures ; his silences almost as eloquent as his utterances. You feel that you have not seen all of him. You would like to trust him far more farther on. He never blunders because of hasty words or immature thought. He never hesitates and struggles toward what he would express. He is in an atmosphere unclouded. He is not only good and wise, but he suggests an ideal of goodness and wisdom. He has a wholly different air, both as man and teacher, from any other person who has ever moved men. He draws as out of himself. He immensely impresses the man who studies him. He is not formed on any Greek ideal. He is not cast in any Egyptian mould. He is not even a Hebrew ideal of the misdirected thought of his day. He is morally a cosmopolitan. His light is not chromatic in tone ; it is the blended colors that give us in him the purest white. Men have tried their practiced hand at depicting the ideally perfect man ; but every attempt, though made by the hands of Plato, is a confessed failure. The model man cannot be invented, but he is recognized, by the foremost moral teachers, as Jesus Christ."

Mr. B—— interrupted me to say: “I admit that the ideal of all goodness is in the Christian conception of Christ. But the farther point is this: Can the conception now held of him by men be historically verified? I admit that when you say of a course of conduct that it is ‘Christian,’ or of an act or mood of mind that it is ‘Christ like,’ you are giving it the highest praise; but whether this ideal comes from the New Testament is another question.”

I answered: “Somewhere Christians got this idea of their Christ. If they originated it, they deserve a vast amount of credit. There would seem to be a great deal of force in Rousseau’s remark about the inventor of such a character as a greater man than his hero, if that were possible. The Christians of all centuries have had these gospel portraiture of Jesus. Of course, they come to a better understanding of his character as they study the ideal as found in the books of the religion we call ‘Christianity.’ And the character had to exist before the Gospels could be made. It was impossible that these Gospels, written so soon after the events recorded, so soon after the person whose life they depict had lived, should be the invention of that time. The world, in no section of it, had any such ideal of a great character. And the subsequent ages had not. We know from the Apocryphal Gospels what sort of a hero that age and those immediately succeeding it would have depicted. We know from the myths that grew up a few centuries after these writings were made, what the ‘mythical theory’ so-called would have given us for a Christ. We see the curious caricatures of goodness that the ‘myths’ of succeeding

centuries have put about the historic facts of the lives of saints and martyrs. The human botchwork shows in an instant. But the unique life of Christ stood out. The ideal, which it has taken nearly nineteen hundred years to appreciate in some good degree, is not a creation of our century. There it is, in the Christian documents, written in the century that saw the facts. How about this wonderful correspondence of our highest moral ideals with those of the four Gospels? Here is a person depicted very carefully by plain men, who could not have invented the idea, much less executed it; doing this in an age monotonously secular and unbelieving; writing it out in simple narratives, in which the person they describe is in all sorts of positions, and never failing in one of them; putting this ideal before the world as actual, living for him they called their Master, and dying for him, getting these facts before the world of Roman and Grecian thought in the very age when this Jesus lived, and somehow getting the world of thinking men to believe intellectually in this model of all righteousness; and doing all this in the clearest-cut century the world has seen! In some way sceptics are bound to account for all this. It will not do to reject the obvious conclusion, except on some full, fair theory which shall explain how all this came about. Immediately after Jesus lived, a few persons had this ideal character before them, holding that a certain person had lived it out. The ideal of those hundreds is precisely the ideal of these millions now. They quoted the same deeds and words that we do now. He was the same Lord and Christ who had lived and died and risen, as he is now. The patchwork of 'scattered

moral ideas of a person sinless' cannot have been gathered from the men of his time. They did not have this conception before he appeared. The next generation had done worse at painting or at retouching the portrait. Farther on, there would have been still greater departure from any worthy idea. The subsequent ages of 'myths'—myths, it must be remembered, are of slow growth—in which incidents might be invented, would have been wider yet in their departure. Fraud and tradition in the recasting of the story were tried on outside gospels, and the curious botchwork is the literary marvel of antiquarians. Myth-makers and poets, taking liberties with facts, exist to-day as in all centuries. And they have made use of a basis of fact in such poems and fables, even when representing English or American history. But, on the other hand, in all these centuries within the line of 'credible history,' which runs back before Christ's time, there have been reliable historians and careful analysts, whose works are preserved. In the 'Homer' and in 'Virgil,' which you and I read in our school days, there were various readings exactly as in the Greek of the New Testament, and we know just how little they interfere with an accurate understanding of an author. The grand ideal of all manhood and the actual historic Christ are not only in agreement, but all Christians claim that they have taken this ideal from the New Testament. If they have not, whence did they get it? It is an absolutely unanswerable problem for the sceptic. It admits of only one solution, and that is a very easy one for the Christian. The agreement of the ideal and the historical shows the source of the former to be the latter. And

no thinking man has any idea that the New Testament conception of a Christ is ever to be superseded. There is perfection in the ideal, perfection in the record of the New Testament, and perfection in the agreement of the two."

He asked: "What would you say—allowing now that the ideal of all goodness and the New Testament Christ are one—what would you say to the 'Tübingen school, once so nearly dead, but now revived again, which intimates that Jesus 'got his doctrine by gathering and fusing into one all the ideas of his time'?"

"Simply this," was my reply; "that the ideas of his time on doctrine were at the lowest ebb. It was an age in which intellectual sharpness had outrun moral conviction; and it was anything but an original time anywhere, in the realm of great moral ideas. The best ideas culled from the world's literature would have presented a most misshapen system, and a character founded on them would have been something monstrous. The Roman idea was that of material force as the means of universal empire; the very opposite of the kingdom set up by Christ. The Greek idea was that of elegant letters, a culture that should be given the few wise men, while the mass of the people were the '*laoi*'—i. e., the common herd, incapable alike of learning or religion. But Christ had no select philosophic set to whom 'the wisdom' could alone be communicated. His system sought not 'the survival of the fittest,' which is morally the doctrine of the cruelest selfishness, but the preservation of the unfittest, the salvation of the lost. He is no Pharisee, discoursing on outwardness in conduct or correctness in

rite. He is no Sadducee, crediting as little in religion as is possible. No more can we imagine him as getting any shred of his teaching from the Essenes of his day, the hermit sect, whose interest in doctrine was small, if only they might be left to a kind of devoutness that cared as little for truth as for practical and godly living. Nor was he a Hebrew, broader minded than his neighbors, who had opened a hospitable door to world-wide teaching from whatsoever source. He makes no impression as of a deeply read scholar whose mind has mastered the lore of the centuries. He is no Egyptian mystic, nor Judean anchorite. He is not at all the monk on the one hand, nor the shrewd philosopher on the other. He is just, in his doctrine and his life, Jesus of Nazareth. He is not a great reasoner, like Paul his apostle. He has not the logic of Roman law, as has Paul in the Epistles, when seeking a logical basis for Christianity. Paul reasons on the facts and teachings of his Master. His Master says: '*I am the truth.*' Paul is great, but his greatness has its boundary. He is never source of his own truth, as was Jesus. We cannot account for Jesus as we can for Paul. We can see Paul in the making. Not so with Jesus. Jesus fulfills the Hebrew ideals as they stand on the pages of the Jewish sacred literature; but of the Hebrew interpretation of the ideal in Christ's day, so variant from that of the Scriptures, there is not a trace. The one answer to the Tübingen school is that the Hebrews of his day rejected him for his doctrine at quiet Nazareth, at bustling Capernaum, and at sacerdotal Jerusalem; that Christ's doctrine was 'a strange thing' when his apostle preached it at Athens, and that when he preached



it at Rome 'no man stood by him.' As in character so in doctrine, Jesus Christ is unique. He is his own doctrine, claiming for himself what no other person ever claimed. The historic and the ideal Christ are one."

I paused to give my friend the opportunity to reply. He did not speak. So I continued:

"On this last point I want to say a word or two more. To claim perfectness in personal character for a man in our race, in such a world as this, means a good deal. Here is a man who morally escapes all the limitations of local environment, and of his own moral age, and of his parentage and tuition. He is born of a mother belonging to this erring race of ours. She is a good, but by no means a perfect woman. The inheritance of human frailty and of innate sinful tendency is in her. The taint is in her blood. But her sin has nothing in her child. Here is a phenomenon—a perfect being, coming by way of natural birth into a sinning race, and yet he is an unsinning being, both as a child and man. The smirch on us all does not soil him. Is it not plain that we cannot have in this race of ours an unsinning man, unless he be also more than a man? Only as a second nature shall lift him up above all the inherited infirmities of his first nature can you have in Jesus a perfect soul."

He said: "Why, that means the divinity of Christ. I had expected you to bring that in somewhere after you had shown him—if you could—the miracle-worker; but you are urging it as a necessity of his perfect humanity."

"Certainly I am," I said; "for how can Jesus escape the sin of the human race, the limitation of his time, and the narrowness of his environment in any other way?"

You know how some would do it. They would claim for his mother sinlessness. But that only pushes the difficulty one step farther back. She sinless, her mother must have been so, on any natural theory of accounting for a sinless Christ. No; the New Testament solution is the only one. Nobody would seriously plead that this second nature should be angelic or superangelic. Nothing meets the need of an interference but a true man; and this true man born into our race, while a man, must be more than a man. We want one to stand up and say in the audience of the wide world 'I am the Truth,' 'I came down from heaven.' We want one who can lay claim to being the 'Only Begotten Son;' one who can be described as 'the Word who was God,' and also as the 'Word made flesh.' To say that God could not incarnate himself in humanity is to assume for ourselves omniscience, and at the same time deny him to be God. But if he has done this, then there is no trouble any longer about certainty in religion. We can be sure where we stand in our religious beliefs. Then he can demand faith from us for his utterances. We need such a Christ, an inhabitant of the eternities, to come out of them and tell us of the reality of that other shore. We are going out on a wide ocean, as all our departed friends are gone. We lose sight of them as they sail away over that sea. They send no message back. If they did, could we trust the messenger telling us anything of eternity? No one of our friends has the infinite eye that measures eternity. Our dead are finite souls. They do not know of the interminable future. They might make some mistake. If the lips of the returning Lazarus had not been sealed, if the son of the widow of Nain had



spoken, the utterances might not have been altogether trustworthy. A finite soul thus going out and coming back, might have fallen into an ambush of evil on the other side. Only Divinity can know of himself of the enduring duration, and what it holds for us. His eye alone rests upon its whole breadth. I am not now pressing the fact of the soul as needing, this side of death, a spiritual salvation, and so as needing such a Saviour as the one depicted in the New Testament. That wider view comes farther on in the argument. Now the reasoning is that for intellectual salvation from errors that affect character and conduct, we need the perfect Son of God, so that we can have one who is human and yet divinely trustworthy. The longest, grandest part of your existence and mine is to be spent in that eternity, and we ought to know enough about it to get ready to go into it."

He interrupted me to say, "Don't you think a man should do right simply and only because it is the right?"

"Exactly so," I answered. "But the wise is a part of the right. It can never be wise in practical life to have no care for the future. It can never be right to shut off self from one's neighbor, self from one's God, self to-day from all care about self for to-morrow. The right in smallest things is profoundly affected by the consideration of the God above us and the eternity before us. And if in smaller how much more in larger things. Some duties are almost created by the facts about God and eternity. It is another sort of life a man ought to live in view of these facts if these things are so. 'The right' in any case is the relation you and I sustain to certain facts. Change the facts, and the right as toward

them changes also. If God has actually 'sent his only begotten Son' into the world, then you and I have a certain duty with relation to that fact. Your life and mine has no right to be the same that it would be apart from that sending of him for us 'that we might have everlasting life.' The moral world, the world in which 'the right and the wrong' are the fundamental law, is another kind of place, and another set of duties spring up instantly, in the presence of such a wonderful intervention from heaven."

He said, "Yes; if Christianity is true, we certainly have to do the right thing toward it."

"And it is not to do the right thing," I said, "if Christianity is true, for us not to let in on our present lives whatsoever of light it may bring us from the life beyond. There is a profound impression even outside of Christianity of an unending future existence. Men feel that as what we do to-day affects our to-morrow, so all that we do in the to-day of our mortal life affects the to-morrow of our immortality. No wise man waits until to-morrow before he does to-day's work. But, on the contrary, every to-day's work is affected by what he knows of its result on to-morrow's welfare. We need a Christ to tell us specifically about that eternal to-morrow, so that we can do our duty toward it in to-day's life. If there is a holy moral state in companionship with God and those in sympathy with him, and it is possible to obtain it by anything we do in this life, we want to know it; we are specially bound to know it; we have a duty laid on us to know it. And we need the teaching, authoritative and positive, of such a person as Jesus Christ, to know of that

heaven and the way to it. When we begin to think along moral lines, we soon come to feel that our immortality cannot be a blank, bold, characterless and colorless thing. It has for us moral quality as well as moral quantity. This is the very line on which Christ's teachings are peculiar. His disclosures of the future are never for the gratification of curious minds. He uses the light of that future by letting it fall on common duties. His revelations of the other world are grandly incidental. They come out in connection with practical daily living. The things to be done to-day, and in this life, are urged by promises about 'the last day' and the 'eternal life.' These revelations are helpful to men who stand, as you and I stand, in the presence of that other world. You are a sick man and I a well man. Yet I may be nearer that world than you. We both are near enough to be personally concerned in getting all the help possible for securing the best there is for us when we go on the inevitable journey."

He was a good deal moved. After a few moments he said: "I have thought always of Christianity as somehow *against* us in its exactions and its professed disclosures."

"And there you have misjudged it. It is all *for* man. It is God's help for us. It offers to do something of advantage for us. It is not bad news, but 'good news.' It gives us each a personal, everliving Christ to go with us in life and through death, and personally to guide us through the disclosures of the eternal world. We need such a Christ."

I told him that some years ago, when a boy, on going

on a railway train into a certain city at midnight, I was a good deal concerned about my destination. The part of the city to which I was to go was utterly unknown to me. I only knew that the way was through a very dark and dangerous part of it. But just before the train rolled into the station, a man tapped me on the shoulder whom I knew very well. He was a man to be trusted. I told him of my trouble. He said he knew the very building I wanted to find. I took his arm at the station, and all fear departed. He led me on through streets I had never seen. We turned this way and that. I was lost if he had left me, but I was safe with him. And he took me all through the winding way, and did not leave me till he saw me safely landed at the house I sought."

He was visibly affected. He only said: "I think I understand you."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DIVINE INTERVENTION REALIZED.

MR. B—— was ready for me, and in answer to my inquiries about his health, said that he was stronger than at my last call, but that the disease had by no means been checked, and that he could not be unaware that it was making progress toward a fatal termination. He was very eager to take up our theme. He himself resumed the conversation by saying: “We were on the matter of the soul as a moral and immortal agent, and as such, in need of an *intervention* of some sort.”

He had before him his edition of Browning, and he wanted to read to me a part of “Cleon,” the heathen writer, who answers a philosophical letter of Protus, the king. Protus had lamented that he and all others must inevitably die—the only possible exception being men like Cleon, whose works in art and literature are to “live on when he is dead.” And Protus wants Cleon to tell him whether that is not, to the painter, poet and author, a comforting thought wherewith to extract from death its pang. Cleon thinks it is just the other way—that a ripe soul loses all the more by death. He says the only alleviation would be personal immortality in which the immense receptivity of joy in great human souls could find satisfaction. Reason does not teach this immortality, nor does Zeus, who would gladly intervene by positive teach-

ing, if there were such a future sure for mortals. Browning makes Cleon say :

“I, I, the man who loved life so overmuch  
Shall sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,  
I dare at times to imagine to my need  
Some future state *revealed* to us by Zeus,  
Unlimited in capability  
For joy, as this is in desire for joy—  
To seek which, the joy—hunger forces us :  
That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait  
On purpose to make prized the life at large—  
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,  
We burst there, as the worm into the fly,  
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But, no !  
Zeus has not yet revealed it. And, alas,  
He must have done so, were it possible.”

I said : “No, Zeus has not revealed it. But we Christians claim that Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light in his gospel. *He* is the intervention we need, and to the question of the reality of this intervention or revelation, we are to give ourselves to-day. We were talking of the immense probability that God would make some special intervention or revelation.”

He stopped me to inquire, if, by the word “revelation,” I did not mean the Bible. I explained to him that the Bible is considered by us less as a revelation and more as an authorized record or history of revelations ; and that these revelations culminated, so we Christians believed, in Jesus Christ. And that, therefore, the words “revelation” and “intervention” expressed substantially the same idea, the latter being more specific, and referring to the act of God in sending his Son.

He interrupted my further explanation by saying : “I

want to ask how you would reconcile any intervention upon an established order of things, with the perfect plan of an infinitely wise God ? ”

“ A fair question,” I replied, “ especially in view of the popular doctrine of evolution. A part of the perfection of any plan is the provision for contingencies ; the outlook upon the emergencies sure to rise in its actual working out in order of time. A general foresees the battle and provides ambulances and surgical appliances. In that provision consists one part of his wisdom. The system of Christian intervention claims origin back ‘ before the world began.’ It has been the steady development of a divine thought. But the culminating manifestation of what was steadily unfolding in human history, came in the introduction of the gospel dispensation—a primal thought as a conception, but a new thing as an intervention, historically considered. These two ways of looking upon the Christian system are by no means antagonistic. Given a wise God and a sovereign God ; and for him not to have foreseen our moral need, nor to have foreseen human bewilderment in this matter of religions, nor to have foreseen the moral involution of sin and error that was to enwrap and derange and so put in peril each of these immortal souls, and for him not to have ready at the moment the historical revelation of his gospel—that would have been un wisdom indeed. A wise scheme is always as perfect in its timeliness as it is in its compass, its methods, and its agencies.”

I added : “ Your question, for which I thank you, has opened a line of proof. And I want to say the whole argument takes in a vast number of points. Indeed, the



moral argument is one that increases in force with the study of long years. For there comes to be a growing sense of the moral fitness, not of one and another single thing, but of each part as related to the other, and of each to the great moral end sought by the system. And this becomes more and more evidential. Only this is to be noted that this gospel of interposition must not be judged in any portion of it apart from the great objects sought by it. No part stands alone, nor even unconnected with the end always in view, viz., the rescue of men from error and sin and sorrow. It is the moral fitness of the scheme to accomplish that end which we want to keep in mind; the moral fitness of a given miracle to the general end of the system itself—if we shall find miracles in it anywhere. It is the fitness of the miracle to the teaching inseparable from it; and the fitness of them both to the character and objects of the miracle worker and the miracle teacher, and the fitness of part to part, and of all with the end of the system, that constitutes the moral argument which I am trying to present. It is the moral fitness of Christianity as a whole broad scheme that I want you to consider—its fitness not only in itself, part to part, but to man in his dignity as an immortal, to him as one who has gone wrong morally and needs to come to be right again; to him as related to God and capable of entering into God's highest moral plan of working; to him as potentially a son of the Father; to him as capable of having a revelation made to him from God's mind and heart, by which comes not only rescue, but the highest conceivable fellowship with God."

He evidently understood what I had just said. For



he looked up in a new and wondering way, as much as to ask why I was saying just those things.

I continued: "You must excuse me. You thought I was going to work to prove the historical truthfulness of the Bible; to show that the miracles, especially those of the New Testament, were actually wrought, and on this basis of *authority* that I was going to demand your faith in the Scriptures."

"Yes," he said, "that is just what I expected you to do."

"With minds of a certain mood, I certainly should offer to do that thing. For that is the logical method. Through all the ages, and the world around, and for the mass of mankind, there is a demand for authority in religion. There is—and rightfully—an expectation of the miracle as a sign and seal, the true and natural voucher for the authenticity of a new religion, or a new dispensation of an old one. In respect to this demand, it is the same for the rude and for the cultured. The demand that the Bible shall contain miracles as credentials is exactly as strong in this as in any former century—with this difference only, that now we recognize a moral end in a miracle, and a fixed era. The class of minds demanding miracles for authenticating a new religion is by no means inferior. Some of the most logical and intellectual men, especially those who are legally trained, require this outward and historic evidence. And God has so made them up that nothing less or other than these external evidences showing that Christianity is a religion founded on facts, will satisfy them. To these men, the absence of miracles from the Bible would be the .

most damaging of all possible things. But, Mr. B——, your mind works in another way. You do not care so much about an authentic fact as about a consistent and proven truth.”

He very courteously responded : “ You do me honor.”

“ Yes,” I replied, “ I do, in one way. You are speculative in your mood. The general fitness of a scheme of things to secure a given result, secures your interest, and forms for you the best proof. To you, the key that fits the intricate wards of the safe-lock, so that all the ‘tumblers’ fall into place, is the key made by the maker of the lock. I want to show you that the key fits.

“ There is among those who profess the religion called ‘Christianity’ a pretty tolerable agreement as to what this religion really is. It is held to set forth substantially these facts—viz: That God has sent into this world his Son to be man’s Teacher to save him from his religious error, man’s Saviour to save him from his sins, man’s Guide to conduct his steps heavenward. This supernatural person was the only begotten ‘Son of God,’ and also the perfectly human ‘Son of man;’ and his unique life and words and deeds, his death and resurrection and ascension, are all included in ‘Christianity.’ With these Christian facts are naturally and inevitably connected a series of doctrines which Christ taught, such as man’s need and doom as a sinner, such as the atoning death, such as the Holy Spirit’s influence on human hearts, persuading men to live worthily as before these facts. And with these facts and doctrines there are found also, a series of promises, including the regeneration of the soul, a resurrection at the last day for the

body, and life eternal for those who so believe in these facts as to give them controlling power over the heart and the life." After a moment I added: "I think this is a fair statement of what may be called the 'creed of Christendom.'"

He replied: "For these facts you are dependent upon the Bible, and about its trustworthiness you have not yet submitted your argument."

"Nor need I, for the object now had in view. I am trying to get a good working definition of Christianity, as it is held by the great mass of those who for all these centuries have professed it as a religion. The Christian facts all existed before the New Testament record of them was written. There is in the world a religion named 'Christianity.' No matter, for my present point, about the especial record of it. If we wanted to be very definite as to a specific thing done by Jesus Christ, or a specific word he said, we should go to the Bible, after proving it authentic. But my argument does not require this at present. I want to get at this religion in its claims and its generally acknowledged facts, exactly as I should want to get you to define the politics of the political party in our land called the 'Republican Party.' I think we could agree pretty well as to its principles and aims and history. We could then discuss it as a political movement, having a definite character and exerting a positive influence upon the nation. So, too, it would be with the Liberal party in English politics, or the Socialistic movement in Germany. It would be true, indeed, that if we wanted to discuss any minute sentence in the political creed of Republicanism, we should have

to go to the documents in which the 'platform' of the party is laid down; or, if we wanted to know any special historic fact, we should consult some trustworthy historian on the times in which the event was said to have occurred. So here; if we were discussing some miracle,—say the feeding of the five thousand, the raising of Lazarus, or the resurrection of our Lord—we should be obliged to go to the documentary evidence for the specific fact; and that would take in the question of the trustworthiness of the gospel histories. But I am now getting at the 'creed of Christianity' as it stands before the world, and I have given a fair statement of the religion which goes under that name. Of course, as in a political party, there are men who emphasize one feature of the common belief more than another; some who would even deny a particular doctrine which others feel to be essential to the completeness of the scheme. But the great consensus of the belief of those calling themselves Christians is what I have in view; and in this way of judging, the facts and documents I have named may be called the fundamentals of this religion. Now, it seems to me that the most conspicuous thing about this religion is that it is an intervention. It professes explicitly to be such. And I want to urge that nothing less or other than an intervention can meet the demand. The need of something from without to come into the existing order of things is a very obvious fact."

I had brought with me a slip containing a recent utterance of Mr. Huxley, and begged Mr. B——'s permission to read it. It was as follows:

"I know no study which is so unutterably saddening

as that of the evolution of humanity as it is set forth in the annals of history. Out of the darkness of the prehistoric ages, man emerges with the marks of his lowly origin strong upon him. He is a brute, only more intelligent than the other brutes; a blind prey to impulses which as often as not lead him to destruction; a victim to endless illusions which make his mental existence a terror and a burden, and fill his physical life with barren toil and battle. He retains a degree of physical comfort and develops a more or less workable theory of life in such favorable situations as the plains of Mesopotamia and of Egypt, and then for thousands of years struggles with varying fortunes, attended by infinite wickedness, bloodshed and misery, to maintain himself at this point against the greed as well as the ambition of his fellow men."

"That sounds a good deal," said Mr. B——, "like an old-fashioned orthodox sermon on total depravity."

I said: "After some little acquaintance with theological writings, I must say that it remained for Mr. Huxley to describe man's moral position as one of 'infinite wickedness;' a statement unparalleled in the most Calvinistic divines. I might quote others, not at all religious men, whose concessions of man's wretchedness if not as startling, are as positive. If ever there was need of intervention it is for a being in such a moral position. There must be some way out of this terrible state of things, or all human history in time to come will be the same sad record. For, as Huxley says in the same connection: 'He'—man—'exactly repeats the process. And the best men of the best epochs are simply those who make the

fewest blunders and commit the fewest sins.' 'Fewest sins.' Then the moral wrongs, the 'sins' of men, are owned as cause and outcome. And that is just what we Christian thinkers claim—viz., that sin is in the race; a development, in itself, of hopelessness. Even man's religions are, to use Huxley's words, 'endless illusions.' The intervention must be moral as well as intellectual, clearing away illusions indeed, but at the same time lifting human nature out of this acknowledged depravity. The darkening of the intellect may leave the soul still fairly right. But the soul wrong, and on the subject of religion, the intellectual mistakes may well be described by Mr. Huxley as 'endless illusions.' We have seen in a former conversation, that moral ends are main ends, and 'the law of the right and wrong' is the law of laws. By disobeying it we have brought upon ourselves immense damage. No other of all the laws of the universe is, so far as we know, great enough to have wrought out all this havoc as shown in human history. Under that law acting on wrong-doers, the only possible development is advance in wrong-doing; unless, indeed, there is the thrusting in of a new potency. Surely there is need enough of rescue from this profound bondage of humanity to sin. For nothing can explain the trouble in which the race finds itself but the fact of sin. Coleridge was wont to say that though sin was a mystery, yet it was the one mystery which explained ten thousand other mysteries. It looks as though there were an actual lock requiring an actual key; as if, in the gospel intervention, some one who had seen the need, had provided the supply. The proposed religion has studied the problem of man, and taken into



account the great moral fact of human sin, so damaging in its results on the human race."

"It has always seemed to me," he said, "that one of the things man needed saving from is his religions."

"Granted," I said; "for they are *his* religions, and without exception they are developments rather than interventions; and in that one fact they differ, by the whole diameter of human thought, from God's religion. The fact, however, to be noted is this, that they all own sin. It is an open question whether or not the most of these religions are not, in part, attempts at a separation from the true God rather than at drawing nearer to him. There are strong evidences that the original religion was that of the one God. So that the religions of the race are, in part, expressions of need, and so far they are the voice of nature in the human soul. But they are also the expression of corruptions, and of declensions from an original faith. It is when thinking of this latter aspect of them that you voice the sentiment of thousands when you say, as you did just now, that 'man needs to be saved from his religions.'"

I waited for a moment to see if Mr. B—— had any objection to offer. He had none, and I proceeded:

"There is another thing to be considered. It is not only that we men have needs, but that we are formed with capacity to receive and use this intervention. Right over against the merely naturalistic doctrine of Huxley of 'infinite wickedness' is another doctrine which the hopelessness of mere naturalism cannot furnish us, but which we Christians claim as the perfectibility of human nature."



He looked up with very evident surprise, as much as to say, "what do you mean?"

I said: "Let me explain. We hold that the sin in human nature now is not essential to the existence of human nature. Our race has capacity for sinlessness. It was sinless once in Eden. It will be sinless again in heaven. It is sinful now through catastrophe. It can get the sin taken out of it by intervention—provided we can find an intervention strong enough. Huxley's horrible doctrine of depravity is a libel on human nature. There is a doctrine of depravity, but it is not his terrible indictment. The naturalist is harsher than any extremist theologian. All depravity now seen is lapse from a better state of man. Sin is not an original part of human nature. It was put in, without destroying the soul, and it can be taken out. The present state is due to bad intervention. The race has capacity for good intervention. It is salvable. It is redeemable. Rescue is possible. There is magnificent capability. As there has been a sinless past, so there will be a sinless future for rescued human nature. The law that evolves from worst to worst, if not suspended, can at least be antagonized. The bad catastrophe can be met by the good redemption. And that is the grand hope of humanity. Outside of divine intervention there is no chance for man. The future history of humanity, according to Huxley's words, is to 'repeat the process.' Christ's religion has hopefulness, because of a peculiar intervention for the restoration of our human nature to its pristine perfectness. Sin, normal to man in the brilliant naturalist's description of him, is abnormal in our Christian view. Our human nature,

perfect once, is capable of becoming, in this gospel way, perfect again. God antagonizes the natural process which, left unrelieved by outward aid, would only repeat itself evermore. And nothing else so honors man's capacity as does this Christianity, which sees with such clear vision that man was capable of Eden, and is capable of heaven, because capable of being rescued by a special redemption."

He said: "You are putting things in an entirely new way. I see that your Christianity, if true, would account for some things, or, at least, would lighten somewhat the heavy burden that any view of human nature forces upon us. I have been wont to think that the Scriptures degraded man rather than exalted him, and I have held the Bible responsible for making a heavy indictment against mankind."

I replied: "You are not alone in charging the Bible unjustly with a good many things. I have heard men talk as if the Bible were responsible for the introduction of sin and for all the depravity of the race; as if it made men sin, when it simply finds them sinners and honestly says so. All the sad facts of the world would be just as sad as now were the biblical religion false. Sin and death, and all the forebodings of another world for wrong-doers, would be just the same. The religion of the Bible does not make sin; it points it out as already existing. Nobody blames a medical work for describing disease. Nobody charges it with responsibility for the sickness it declares. It tells of the sickness so that it may tell of the antidote. All gospel facts are glad facts for this world and the next. The news of the interven-

tion is 'the good news'—*i. e.*, the gospel. Sin and depravity and doom here or hereafter are not things that the Bible makes true. It names them, to tell men how to escape them. No other book so praises man's original capacity for moral exaltation. No other book shows him such a hopeful outlook. He is by capacity a child of God, and is capable of complete rescue from sin and an absolutely perfect heaven. True, if he is a sinner with such powers, his sin is all the more grave. So that the grander his capacities the greater his guilt. But even this view is not to shut him up to 'repeat the process.' He is capable of receiving an intervention and a salvation. Hence, the Scriptural presentations, viz., that God made man '*in his own image.*' '*Death has passed upon all men, for that all men have sinned.*' '*God sent forth his Son to redeem.*' '*He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*' '*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.*' The lock has somewhere a key. It looks as if this key might have been made for that lock. The need of an outside interference, and that, too, by the great God himself, and jointly, man's capacity for being rescued, are facts too clear not to commend themselves. Jesus Christ himself claimed that his mission was to restore the old, lost, natural sonship. He said: 'The servant abideth not'—by any natural right—'in the house forever. But the son abideth ever.' The son had possession. Sin is the usurping servant who holds sway. But the servant, sin, is not there because the house was made for him. He is not of necessity a permanent dweller. He is in nowise needed as a part of its completeness.

He can be expelled. Christ came to cast out the usurping servant and reinstate the rightful son."

His response was in these words: "Well, I think I must plead guilty to one thing. I certainly have put the responsibility for all the bad and sad facts upon the religion of the Bible, and I have not given it the least credit for the good and glad facts it seems to offer to men."

"One thing more," I said, "about this matter of capacity. It seems to me that a man's greatest capacity is his capacity for faith, 'his ability to believe on evidence in what some one, who knows the truth on a special subject, testifies to him,' his capacity for knowing more than he by his personal powers could ever know. He can believe in a knowledge superior to his own, and rest confidently and act consistently on the knowledge which any one, who in a given line is his superior, may communicate to him. He has the power to trust a specialist in physical geography who tells him of rivers, oceans and continents beyond his own ken. He can trust a specialist in astronomy, who tells him of the approaching eclipse, and not a man in a civilized land doubts that the astronomical event will come exactly on time. Nine-tenths of our knowledge comes from trust in specialists. Trust or faith is the hand that uses other men's hands. We grasp by it things beyond our unaided reach and make them our own. This capacity for faith is of the greatest service in every department of life. Without it human progress would be impossible. We trust specialists in their own department. God is a specialist in religion. He addresses our capacity for faith in himself and makes it,

here as elsewhere, the chief avenue of knowledge. We are gifted with this power of going out of ourselves, and taking hold of the testimony of God, so that we may be raised thereby. If we are made to trust, then God has made something or some one to be trusted. The divine intervention for redeeming man will then address itself to our faith primarily; just as does all else that is highest and best which we know. The moral sphere will use faith as its especial method; faith in God being as reasonable as it is right. A gospel from God will have its evidences that God has spoken, and those evidences will address themselves to our reason; but what he will say in that gospel of intervention will be of higher range than our reason, or there would be no need of his saying it. If all he has to say is only what we could find out by our reason, and if our reason is the test of what he says in his proven gospel, then God could teach us nothing. And while man could teach man about astronomy or geography, and even about religion, God could teach man nothing that he did not know aside from the teaching. In short, in man's capacity for faith lies his greatest hope; for by it he can lay hold of God's intervention and salvation. So that rescue must come from without as an objective fact, but, in some way, that rescue must be seized upon by man. He has a hand. Then there is something on which to lay hold. The hand is that of faith laying hold of divine intervention."

Mr. B—— had shown great interest in these views of the need of divine interference. The idea of man as needing to be saved from his religious mistakes by a force outside his own development, and also the idea of

man's original dignity and of him as now capable of grasping a deliverance which God should send him, evidently took very firm hold on his mind. He begged me to call the next week. And after a brief prayer I took my leave.

## CHAPTER IX.

### AUTHORITY IN RELIGION.

MR. B—— at the next interview handed me a popular Saturday evening newspaper, in which was a sermon by a distinguished clergyman. He asked me what I thought of it. After looking it over for a few moments I returned it and answered his question by asking the same.

“I will tell you frankly,” he said. “This sermon denies to Jesus Christ anything beyond mere manhood. It only allows him a higher development of manhood than was gained by any one else in his day. Now, I have no patience with this sort of thing. It is sometimes thought that this letting down of Christianity is the way to win those of us who are sceptically inclined. But I know better; for I know what such men think and say. It is either infidelity, as you religious people call it, or it is Christianity for me and for the world. It makes no converts to Christianity to belittle its Christ. He certainly claimed, if we can trust the record, to be more than a mere man. The prophecies that announced him, his own express declarations, his constant claims upon the supreme allegiance of mankind, his works—if indeed, we can believe them miraculous—are all unmistakable. If the record is trustworthy, he was divine as well human. In one way these claims make it harder for us to receive Christianity; but, on the other hand, if we do receive



him, we have an authority worth something to us. But to try to account for Christianity by saying that Jesus was a man with a 'genius for religion,' and that he saw 'some things clearer than other men in his day,' is less reverent to Christ, when we remember his claims, than outright unbelief. I must be one thing or the other, a Christian or a sceptic. A man who absurdly tries to stand on any middle ground is swept by the guns of both sides. There must be authority or there can be no religion. The only sufficient authority must be divine."

I said: "What you have just asserted does not surprise me. In conversation with other men inclined to be sceptical, the same fact has been declared."

Wishing to get his answer, I said: "What would be your reply, then, to words like these in the sermon: 'If a man reasons at all on the subject of religion, he admits by the fact of adducing reasons, the supremacy of reason over any book or any person; and that is to deny the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the Bible. The last tribunal must be our reason.'"

"I should say," he answered, "that this is very poor logic. For if the existence of Jesus Christ is conceded, then on the lowest ground, viz., that 'he had a genius for religion,' his conclusions are to be carefully considered; and if the Bible be considered as from God, certainly God can instruct man."

"Then you think," I rejoined, "a case can be imagined in which a man's own reason may have to submit to higher authority."

"Yes, if you are only sure of the authority in any teaching on religion. Given divine authority, and you

have divine reason. And if we can have it, then religion is possible, and then only. All outside of authority is so much speculation on such matters; or at most, if we can only find those things on which all men agree in religion, the belief in them may be called reasonable. We may hope those things are true. But even then, what we want in religion is authority. If we have divine authority, then it would be reasonable to submit reason itself to such authority. Only, it is to be noted, this divine authority must be proved to be such."

"Exactly so," I replied. "You have made for me just the place I wanted in my argument for to-day. The authority of a supernatural person, such as we claim that Jesus Christ actually was, is the view I wanted to present in this conversation. We saw, last week, that we could not have, even in Jesus Christ, a perfect man, unless there was also another nature, an added divine nature. We were in search of an authority by which we could be delivered from those 'endless delusions which men have called religions,' and I was showing the perfectness of Christianity in that it expressly provides for this very thing. Christianity as a scheme presents Jesus Christ as competent authority in religion. The great question in every age is that of authority for crediting religious beliefs, about which, in the nature of the case, the human mind cannot of itself know the facts. The facts of religion all run out into infinity. They are largely beyond our ken. We see a little way. Then comes mist. We want to know. We must know to understand our duty. Reason goes a little distance and is self-limited. But reason can judge concerning the

competence of authority. It can know whether in any sphere of knowledge a man is trustworthy, even when it cannot pronounce of itself upon the deliverances of authority as right or wrong. It can discover the fact that a person is trustworthy as a witness, when it does not know a word he will say. It is competent to judge whether a certain astronomer is to be credited when he predicts an eclipse even when one is unable to verify the calculation.

“A man’s reason,” I continued, “is a competent judge on two conditions; first, when the things on which it judges are in its own sphere; and second, when it has before it all the essential facts. It is a fair question for a man’s reason to decide whether a supernatural person, such as Christianity claims its Christ to be, has ever really appeared among men. And so Christianity offers itself as a historic religion, with names, dates, places, facts, declarations; and it appeals to proofs and demands to be judged by the rules of ordinary evidence. It submits reasonable proofs that it is from God. In this sense, it claims to be a thoroughly reasonable religion. It exhibits credentials. It calls attention to an authentic and proven signature. It asks candid men to judge whether the signature is or is not genuine. It is because Christianity claims, in this sense, to be a reasonable religion, that I am here arguing about it. I am showing that it offers to man’s reason its proofs of a Christ; that this Christ is one who can speak with authority; and that when we have once proved him to be such a Christ, then, not our reason, but this Christ himself is full and final authority in religion; that we accept his deliverances even

though in the nature of the case they will not always agree with what, apart from his testimony, we should conclude to be reasonable and right. We are competent to sit in judgment on his claims; that done, we receive his utterances, depending on them as firmly as if we ourselves understood all the reasons that led him to make them. Not we ourselves, but he himself, in that case, is final authority."

I reminded him that I had acted a few weeks before as a witness to his signature to his will; that I was a competent witness on that matter; that whether I did or did not approve of the instrument had nothing to do with the fact of the signature as genuine; that it was not even necessary for me to know a word of the document; that I might have my opinion of what its contents would be; that, should I ever know them, I might or might not find them to be what I expected he would put into the testament he had made. The one thing is this: That I am a competent witness to the signature. Some things, should I ever hear the document read, might appear to me from my position unwise or even unjust. But I do not know all the reasons that led you to make a given bequest. Did I know them, the unreasonable might appear most reasonable, and that which at first seemed wrong might be the most righteous section of the instrument. My sphere of action, meanwhile, is that of testifying to the signature—a matter in which I am a competent witness.

He at once acknowledged the distinction; and that Jesus Christ, once proved to have divine authority of statement, we are not entitled to sit in judgment on his declarations or to reject any of his utterances. We can

compare them and discuss their meaning. It is ours, in that case, unhesitatingly to accept his deliverances in religion. "But," he added, after a moment's pause, "are you not arguing in behalf of the Bible?"

"No," I replied, "not distinctively for the Bible, except as, incidentally, it would seem that we should need some sort of trustworthy record of Christ's authoritative teachings. My aim is now to show that Christianity as a scheme provides, in its peculiar Christ, for the authority so needful in religion; and that this provision and this supply of the need, are among the proofs that it is the one true religion.

"As to the other case I named, in which human reason is entirely competent, viz., where it can know all the essential facts about a transaction, let me say that every great doctrine of religion lies in a region, for the most part, where only one Being can know enough about it to warrant definite and positive assertion. Take the doctrine of atonement. All the facts involved, all the reasons for it, all the relations of it to God and to man, all the amazing reach and sweep of it, are evidently far beyond our comprehension. We see a few of the many elements that enter into the one only complete atonement. From what we see, we are convinced that there is far more of it which is and must be unseen by us. We discover beginnings which warrant the belief of magnificent completions. We see as through a glass darkly. We know that so much runs on into eternity whither our eye cannot reach, that we are incapable of getting the facts before us, and our judgment must be impotent; so that we can accept, and, equally, we can deny atonement, only

upon divine authority. It is the same with prayer, as answered or unanswered. Good reasoning can obtain on both sides of that question. Only divine authority can settle the matter for us. It is the same with the way of salvation; the same with the doctrine of a final judgment day; and it is the same with an eternal heaven. Not a little good logic can be offered both for and against these doctrines. The one can be pitted against the other. We must have authority, or cease all definite affirmations. Infidelity needs divine authority in order to be credible as really as does Christianity."

He interrupted me, saying with some sharpness of tone: "How is that? How is that?"

"It is this way: that on all these great doctrines the infidel creed is just as long as is the Christian. For a man to say, 'I believe there is no heaven' is just as much to propound a portion of his creed as for another man to say 'I do believe in an eternal heaven.' And to say either one of these things positively, apart from divine authority, is as unwarranted in the one case as in the other. Argument is offered for each of these views. And whether or not the argument is convincing depends largely upon the personality of the one to whom it is addressed. An eternal heaven rather than an eternal probation is held by many persons to be among the things that cannot be proved by any human reasoning. It is a matter in which our only absolute assurance must be competent authority. And Christianity furnishes in its Christ one whose declaration is the only valid proof."

"Why not, then," he responded, "let all these questions go?"



“Just because, Mr. B——, it cannot be done. Just because men will and must think of them. It is in our very constitution not to ‘let them go.’ They will not depart. From the very first, men have asked how shall man be just with God, and never has an age asked it more earnestly than this. Let no man think that questions about atonement, prayer and salvation, questions of eternal life and death, are to be dropped out of our nineteenth century thought. Never were they more keenly debated. Once these questions were discussed mainly by religious men; now they are taken up, at least on their literary side, by literary and scientific men who make not even a profession of religion. I saw lately a list of some fifty volumes by authors whose intellectual calibre was shown by their whole style, both of thought and expression, as no mean foemen—all of whom dealt with these questions more or less in the spirit of denial. Men do not spend themselves in this fashion over dead issues. They do not kick at corpses. These questions are live issues in all human thought the world around and the ages through. It is not in human nature to drop them. Every man will have something to say about them. There are no religious questions that have not a literary and a philosophical side. They are of surpassing interest in one way or another to all men. If it is, as some would hold, foolish to discuss them because by reason alone we can never decide them, still the majority of the human race will commit that foolishness. When the philosophic interest in them does not fascinate men, the tremendous personal interests involved will compel attention; and men are going to think and feel and act



in reference to these things as long as human nature endures on earth. To insist that interest in such doctrines is foolishness, is to insist that men are, on this matter, a race of lunatics. And as men go on in the discussion of these questions, it becomes increasingly evident that there can be no final solution except that of divine authority. For, not reason, not intuition, nor yet consciousness, even when it is Christian consciousness, can give us the last and satisfying word, since these are matters where it is reasonable to take only the utterances of a supernatural Christ. Apart from his declarations there will be no certainty. And because Christianity sees this need and provides for it, and no other religion furnishes such a Christ, it gives evidence alike of its origin and its truthfulness."

He said: "But other religions have their saviours. I found at a bookstore lately a volume entitled 'Twelve Saviours or One.'"

"Did you read it?"

"Yes."

"And you found it a bungling attempt to throw discredit on Jesus Christ."

"That is true. It was a strained effort to show that each of the great religions had some one who in some respects helped men."

"All of which goes to show that the yearning, often blind and unregulated, is still in human souls; that the capacity for receiving the Christ of God still exists, while the mistaken and superstitious efforts to satisfy the yearning show the need of real and divine intervention. There has been but one Christ, who first deepens the

natural sense of need, and then fills up all the channels of our broadest thought and profoundest longing with the gracious flow and overflow of his own fullness. Jesus Christ, a Saviour at all, is a peculiar Saviour, unique in person, in character, in work, in teaching, in death, resurrection and ascension. His massed peculiarities make him *the* Saviour, in a sense in which he can have no rivals, and in which a superior is impossible. So that Jesus Christ *a* Saviour, and also *the* Saviour, he must necessarily be the *only* Saviour. In the line of authority, he is complete. The need is not of God *in* man—that has always been more or less true since Adam's day, and that were no novelty, however much the divine illuminations might be increased; since always there would be the limitation of human power to receive the measure of the divine nature. It is not only 'God in Christ' that we need, but it is God *and* man united in a single personality, thus giving us sympathy and authority, thus spanning the widest contrasts and harmonizing the greatest diversities, so that this Christ could utter words which would have been blasphemy on any other lip, but which could come with all graciousness and potency from his. The idea of such a Christ is unmatched in human thinking. The conception is a miracle in a world of thought, just as its realization in Jesus Christ is a miracle in the world of fact. That incarnated ideal in Jesus Christ sets Christianity at an immeasurable distance from any other religion. As a system of thought, as a mere scheme to be studied for its logical and intellectual completeness, it is not only unrivalled, but unapproachable. The profound need of One on whom to depend is per-

fectly met in him. And it seems to me that a wise man will cling to this authoritative Christ until he shall find a better, grander, more wonderful and glorious Christ—one with more startling works as evidences of his character and mission, one with a tenderer compassion, one who will be more helpful to us while we live and offer to us a more assured and complete salvation when we die. There not only is not, but there cannot be such another Christ. This key perfectly fits the lock."

I continued: "Already you must be beginning to see that the certainty which Christianity offers to your unrest is a most engaging feature of this religion. I have been aiming to let you see for yourself the inside of this religion; its wonderfulness as a scheme, its fitness to do the work demanded of a religion; and though we have gone over but one little segment of this great circle, day by day in these conversations, and have kept ourselves mainly thus far to the idea of authority in religion as rightfully emanating from such a person as Jesus Christ, I think you will see, as the system is opening before you, that it is a vastly wider and grander thing than you had thought. It is at least worthy of your study from the inside. If I can only get you to grasp its central thought of a Christ, to take in broadly the conception of what Christianity really is, as it brings him forward, I am sure to get your final conviction to its truthfulness. Just as sunlight is the best proof of the sun, so an actual view of this religion is the best evidence that it comes from God. It is this inside survey that I want you to take."

He replied that he had always looked at the outside rather than the inside; that he had seen the surface

rather than the heart of the system. He said: "I have done a good deal of reading on the wrong side. Perhaps if I could get my health again, I would go down and hear you preach."

I thanked him for the compliment, and reminded him that though we had known each other for several years, I had never seen him at church. He said he had not been a church-goer. I asked him if that was fair treatment of religion.

"No," he said. "I admit it is not the right thing. A man might profitably spend one day in seven in religious inquiry and among religious people. Especially is this true for me now, as I am getting to see what sort of a religion this Christianity actually is."

I took my leave, with more hope that the result of these interviews would be advantageous to my friend.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE FACT OF SIN.

**M**R. B—— continued comfortable. He was ready to proceed at once in our discussion for the day. I said: “I think you admitted the reality of error.”

“Yes; error on all subjects, especially on religions. I cannot imagine anything more real than these errors of men.”

“But,” I replied, “an error when made through prejudice or passion, through lack of attention, or through lack of sympathy with a truth, may be also a *sin*. Approaching the matter from the intellectual side, you must admit that a man, on some questions, does wrong who makes a mistake.” He nodded affirmatively, and I continued: “Sin, then, is just as real in the moral as is error in the intellectual realm; and a man may be as responsible for the one as for the other; and in a given case may be responsible for both. ‘The object of science,’ says Mr. Huxley, ‘is the discovery of the rational order which pervades the universe.’ What the eminent scientist says is true, but it is the lesser part of the whole truth; for, in addition to the rational order, we must recognize the moral order of the universe. As science is the restoration to man’s conception of the one, so religion is his restoration to the true conception of the other—the vastly more important thing being this moral order. And this fact

of sin, since it touches the core of things, since it is offensive to what is most central in God, and to what is deepest, broadest, highest and most vital to our own souls, is a tremendous fact; and so it is one that always has and always will demand and receive the notice of all men in their calmest, noblest moments. The sin-consciousness in the history of man is as actual a fact as any other that can be named; as certainly a conviction of man's soul as that God is, as that truth is, as that duty is. And human history has not a page that would not be vastly otherwise, were there no such deep-down and central conviction in human nature. You recall the startling confessions of the Greek and Latin moralists; their strong sense of personal defection, their consciousness of bondage under the law of evil. All the great tragedians—especially those of the Greek school—founded every grand presentation of human life, in poem and play, on the reality of this sin-consciousness. It is a simple and undeniable fact—this accusation of conscience as to sin."

He interrupted me to quote from *Macbeth*:

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No. This my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red."

"But," he added, in a moment, "is not all this true rather of the great men who have committed great crimes, and not of humanity in its rank and file?"

"It is man as man, the universal man, who has built altars in every age; so that a race of men without heads would be as likely to be discovered as a race without a

religion ; and in every case the altar has had on it the sacrifice suggested by this cry of the sin-consciousness. The sacrifice may have been horrible, or grotesque, or absurd. But it was an attempt, blindly made, it may be, but still actually made, to meet an actually felt need of expiation, so as to get rid of this sense of sin. Not lowest men, but highest, nor heathen men only, but devoutest and loftiest souls as well, have felt this sin-consciousness. Take the case of David, the Hebrew bard, whose words are more widely quoted than those of any other singer the world ever knew. For years, a singularly pure and religious soul, then sinning, and next moaning and sobbing out his contrition in the fifty-first psalm. That psalm once read, no man will ever again reproach him, but evermore pity him in his genuine abasement before his God. This man emerges from his sin at length, a better man ; his after life as pure as his former had been. And Isaiah, foremost man of his day in personal purity and in lofty religious patriotism, seeing in the temple the ‘ vision of God,’ cries out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ Christian men and women of highest character have testified to this same sense of sin—never stronger than in their loftiest moments when they most felt that they were in the immediate presence of their God. By putting into the petition known as the Lord’s Prayer the sentence ‘forgive us,’ the Author of Christianity shows us that in his idea sin is to be, and is to be pardoned daily, so long as man endures on the earth. This clearly defined fact of the sense of sin, in good and bad, in high and low, in ignorant and cultured, in Pagan and Christian, in earlier and in later ages, is most remarkable. It is a fact that must



be met in some way, and on some consistent theory. If a falsehood, it is one bound up ineradicably in the very constitution of man as now we find it. If a falsehood, then no deliverance of human consciousness on any matter is of the least authority or value, and we need not try to blind ourselves to the conclusion that men are not only intellectually but also morally insane."

He said in reply that he had always been perplexed about this matter of the sense of sin in the human race. He admitted the immense force of the conviction as shown in the history of the world. But he asked whether this sense of sin was not less in the nineteenth century than ever before?

I answered: "Some things regarded once as sinful are now reckoned as innocent and even praiseworthy; so that, in the change of standard, there is doubtless, in some directions, no little relief. There were men who once were in agony over a saint's day forgotten, over a fast-day omitted, a church rule broken. There were men who once held any indulgence in natural and healthful recreations to be wrong; that the gratification of taste in music, in art, in any other than strictly religious literature, was wrong; that any indulgence in human affection was so much stolen from one's love to God; that care for the body was a wrong done to the soul. The correction of these mistakes as to duty, in one way, lessened the number of things thought to be sinful, and so reduced the sense of sin in regard to such things. But on the other hand, the better understanding of religion has opened whole reaches of duty in the line of right thinking and right feeling and right acting, in the line of

regenerate Christian living, and in the service of God and of man, that were almost unknown before.

There is a new wide world coming into view, in the soul's larger relations to God and to the Holy Spirit; in the broadened duties owed by man to his neighbor, owed by each to all the rest of the human race; so that now an instructed conscience sees a thousand things in which there are shortcoming and failure and sin, where once the old outwardness of the religious view neither saw nor suspected any wrong. I believe an intelligent sense of sin was never so strong as it is to-day." He looked up with an incredulous glance, and I continued: "The proof of what you think a strong assertion, is found, among other things, in the strenuous efforts to get rid of this sin-consciousness. In more thoughtful men, it takes the form of philosophic reasoning. Take the new doctrine of heredity—new, indeed, in name, but a very old Scriptural doctrine. It is hardly a quarter of a century ago, that the stock objection to the Bible was that it proposed to visit the sin of the fathers on the children, even to the third and fourth generation. Now, everybody owns that this is exactly what we often see. But the undeniable law of heredity is used as a plea for the lessening of guilt. The blameworthiness is scattered over the line of ancestry, and personal responsibility is reduced to a minimum, or is altogether dissipated. Drunkard, libertine and thief are not only busy at their old work, but have the new occupation of attributing their wrong-doing to their heredity instead of blaming themselves. They are getting to be facile at excusing personal sin. They are forgetting that the endorsement of the tendency by the individual actor

is not only his sin, but is the adoption of the tendency itself, and so makes one responsible therefor. Heredity with personality makes larger responsibility; and if one does the wrong, it makes the larger sin; there is not only the inherited, but the personal depravity. And the sense of the sin is made more condemnatory, to thoughtful men, by the very effort to excuse it. In the same way, frivolous persons turn from the seriousness of religious duty, under the plea of natural disposition; and unspiritual men give as an excuse for absorbing worldliness that they were not born with a religious nature,—thus endorsing the old biblical idea of heredity in a fallen race. The plea owns the blameworthiness, but locates it in other personalities, or finds it in the guiltiness of the general human race; the plea acknowledges the fact of the sin. One wonders how those who thus admit the fact, and then put off the blame of it on ancestry, are going to escape the idea of a first father's first sin in Eden, and its influence on every child of Adam ever since that day, so that we are 'born in sin.'"

He looked up and said, "Is not that pretty strong orthodoxy?"

"Yes, heredity is orthodoxy on that point. But you must recall one of our conversations a few weeks ago on the doctrine of personality in God and in man. Heredity and personality are twin facts, and instead of substracting something from each because of the other, they are both the stronger, because each is true. Heredity enlarges the duty of personality. You are to be, personally, a better man, because you have children who take from you the ineffaceable stamp of your very self."

"It is the same with environment—the great word of one class of modern scientists. It is used by some men to excuse personal wrong-doing; to annul the sin-consciousness. It is held that a man is the product of his age as well as of his ancestry; of his surroundings as well as of his heritage, and often of both. He is the fly imprisoned in the amber. He must be about what he is, in the entanglement of his circumstances. The principle is pushed so far that it throws off the blame for undeniable wrongs, for frightful abuses in social life, for desperate evils in the community, and for the depravity of the race, upon impersonal surroundings. Of course, there is a power of environment. Laocoon and his sons are entangled in the serpent's folds. Classic story, universal philosophy and the Christian Scriptures, all agree in the fact of a mighty moral entanglement. Evil is a bondage on the race, and a drag on the man. But we are to note very carefully that the fact of the sin is always conceded. These folds of the writhing, strangling serpent are very real. Here are fetters on the wrists made by these chains. Sin is something, or somebody is responsible. Is it really a question about some thing? Are things morally responsible? Many a man who presses so strongly his environment as the excuse for his sin, would snap those bonds in the case of social obstacles. Some such men, on matters such as intemperance and deceit, have done it. But here is the further trouble: these natural and social obstacles are only the shadows of a greater entanglement and of a worse environment. It is moral wrong afloat on all the moral atmosphere of the world; it is a moral miasma, rising like a fiend from pestilential craters, and

sweeping over the plains where men pass their lives,—it is these that make up a part of this environment. It is a moral wrong that engirds and enfolds and throws over us its spell, and enchants us with its dreams and infects us with its virus. It is this moral encompassment of a broken moral order, admitting into it a whole world of maxims, and proverbs and sayings, the “portable wisdom” which each generation calls, admiringly, the “spirit of the age,” and which is always colored and controlled by the lower, rather than the higher thinking, and by worldly rather than by Christian sentiment—it is this encompassment that is so significant, and that is urged so often as a plea for doing the wrong. One must do as Romans do, at Rome, it is said. ‘As well be out of the world as out of the fashion, either in dress or in thought.’ There is false tone; there is confusion as to the pitch, and discord in the song. ‘What does one voice avail,’ it is said, ‘against this resounding chorus?’ And all this confusion and environment and entanglement of evil, as a thoughtful man ponders it, comes to be very suggestive. A wise man asks of himself whether he, in his own soul, is quite free from all this thing. Is his own polarity undisturbed? Has he himself any real freedom from this entanglement? Is he himself not also somewhere perverted as really as those others whose perversity he condemns? Is not he himself also partaker of this heredity of wrong, this environment of sin? He sees others as tempters. Is he himself also a tempter? He asks whether he may not be leading, in some wrong way, other souls,—whether he has not a double responsibility, first for himself and next for all he has influenced and can

now touch through this environment. So that, when a man thinks this thing through, he sees that he environs others as well as they him, and that his personal responsibility is vastly enlarged, rather than at all diminished, by environment. He begins to ask whether sin is not the more real and vital and personal amid such a state of things than if we were separate Adams, each in an Eden, where there could be neither environment nor posterity."

"Then, too," I continued, "the evil environment has been in not a few cases a counter-irritant. It has furnished the best discipline, and given largest room for conscious victory. A man in an intemperate family has awakened to the fact that drink has ruined a father or a brother. Their destruction is his warning. He will not be wrecked on that reef. By a tremendous effort of will he has thrown himself out of his environment and into the opposite surroundings, and so has secured a character impossible to be obtained by those who have not been subjected to his struggles. Storms give reputation to pilots. A sinful world without, and a wrong bent within, are immensely formidable things, but they afford scope for conquest. So that a man's very environment of evil, if not quite overwhelming, may furnish, during these probationary days, to himself and to his God, the largest opportunity for moral rescue. An evil environment that is absolutely overwhelming is one in which a man is not salvable. But a limited environment, in which rescue can come only from a divine rescuer, may fix in a man's soul a profound sense of the reality of sin and of its amazing hold on his deepest nature. There is shown the stored force of evil. There is such a thing as moral



dynamite ready for the explosion at the fatal touch. In such a case a man is all the more bound to walk carefully, since a single spark may ignite this magazine. Personality is stronger than ever in these circumstances. The environment, instead of subtracting anything, adds immensely to the sin of personal wrong-doing. Like heredity, environment may increase, beyond all human computation, one's individual condemnation.

"But all these efforts, so futile and yet so earnest and persistent, to throw off personal responsibility for sin, show the inner uneasiness. The struggle shows the strength of the antagonist. And the lower depths of the soul are reached sometimes when God lets down the deep-sea plummet, by his Providence, his Word, and his Spirit. Despite all excuses, we men know that there has been wrong done, done by our central selves; and we sometimes find that we are ourselves the wrong."

He said: "This whole matter of sin is a great perplexity. When we look at men in large cycles, the feeling which you call the self-consciousness certainly has been a factor in human history. But, for the most part, individual men, so far as I can see, are not very much concerned about it. They seem to get on very easily, as if it did not greatly burden them. And yet when trouble comes—" he stopped short in his sentence. Presently he added the words—"trouble such as I have now,"—he here paused again. As if speaking to himself, a moment or two after, he added: "I wish I knew whether or not this sense of sin in man was a genuine thing, or was due to despondency in sickness; was a matter of fact, or a matter of weak nerves."



I said: "If only sick people through the ages had felt and acted under it, if only nervous patients in physicians' hands had known this experience, it would be another thing. But the calmest reasoners, the sanest souls, the foremost men in moral action, the most gifted of the world's millions, are among those who, in their best and surest moral hours, have testified to the fact of the sin-consciousness. It is not a sick man's whim, nor the imposition of priestly ideas on human nature. It is among the most genuine and certain and reliable convictions ever found in human souls. The efforts to get rid of it by propitiations of various sorts, in every religion, which, at immense cost, men have maintained all over the globe, show at once the reality and the potency of the conviction."

"Yes," he said. "I only gave expression to a passing thought as to the possible unreliability of the conviction. Sin is a very real thing. But how do you account for the fact that very great sinners seem often to have very little compunction for their sin?"

"Have you not noticed," I replied, "that very singular operation of law whereby the sharpness of a man's detective power in any question of right and wrong is blunted by misuse? The eye of his discernment grows dim. His judgment on moral questions gets confused and uncertain. It is a case of sin punished by the sinner being left to do more sinning. It is by no means the whole of conscience that is thus benumbed. For conscience is capable of retroaction under new light as to old facts. It has in leash a power of condemnation, which, in the nature of the faculty, is sure to break loose and spring

like a crouching tiger at the soul as its prey. Its action over the past seen in the clearer light of eternal truth is sure to be felt at length—unless, indeed, we can think that a quiet conscience can be equally and permanently gained by great vice and by great virtue ; that a hardened and a sensitive conscience bring the same result in the end. For when conscience does not condemn, it must be because it is seared by sin or satisfied by innocence. The one other case is when it *has* condemned and then is pacified by the forgiveness of God. But, naturally, the condemnatory power is in it, and it can be awakened. There is an abiding fear that one may meet something that shall rouse it ; and hence the effort to keep down and out of sight this self-consciousness, until a man, screening from his own vision his deeper convictions, and living by the surface of his thoughts, feels, as he wishes to feel, little disturbance. The reason why so many men get on so easily and with so little exercise of conscience, and so small a sense of sin, is that very many persons, in the words of Christ, do ‘not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov’d.’ But let anything occur to touch a man’s soul to the quick, and this sense of sin as found not only in deeds done, but in wrong moods of mind that have been cherished, will start into vigorous exercise. Then come frantic efforts to press it back and down and out of sight. Then come the contrivances of folly to annul serious thought ; the teachings of a vain philosophy which would put on others the blame. What struggles to keep from being annoyed, disturbed and distressed by the restiveness of an awaking conscience ! Men shut their eyes naturally to what is

unpleasant. They are like merchants who go from year to year without taking account of stock or posting their books—afraid of the result. Men tread lightly on thin ice. There is a fear in the case of many who get on easily for the most part, of seeing the truth that would rouse anxiety. Yet the manlier way is to face the full facts, and, through the help of God's grace, disarm them of their fear and destroy their power of condemnation."

"And now," I continued, "here is the argument—that Christianity as a system recognizes this vital fact, and provides for it an actual historic propitiation in Christ. It proposes a forgiveness of sins, not as an arbitrary act of outright omnipotence, but by showing a moral reason in a very peculiar atonement for doing that thing. It makes not only legal but moral provision for rescue. It looks not only to relief from penalty, but to deliverance from moral entanglement. It is a system of intervention by service and sorrow. In a single word, Christianity proposes to meet fully and fairly this unfortunate and blameworthy state of things in the human soul. It not only presents a unique Christ, but brings out into prominence his unique work as the infinite reason for God's act in forgiving, and the corresponding reason for our faith in this divine way of salvation from both the penalty and the inveteracy of sin. A new element is introduced into the problem by this Christ. And it affects the whole moral order of things. It brings forward a new moral environment that displaces the old. We call this work "Christ's Atonement." And the object of it is best given, perhaps, in the words of the greatest Christian thinker of the ages, the Apostle Paul, when he says

it is a system of things devised so 'that God might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth.'"

He said: "That is your Christian doctrine of the atonement, so-called, is it not?"

"Yes."

"But I have very serious objections to that particular doctrine."

"Perhaps you have some better and more comprehensive theory of meeting the questions raised by this sin-consciousness, of which we have been talking to-day."

"No, I have not much of a theory on any of these matters."

He was weary. I said that we might take up the matter of atonement at our next interview. And with a word or two of prayer I closed the visit.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE ATONEMENT.

MR. B—— was not so well at our next interview. But his mind seems to grow more vigorous, and he confessed to a very deep and substantial interest in the questions we are discussing. He said: “To-day, we are to devote this hour to the subject of an atonement, and I would like to begin our talk by stating the objections I have always had to the whole conception, as I understand it. It has always seemed to me a needless thing, an excrescence rather than an excellence to your Christian system.”

I interrupted him to say that “we were now agreed to look at any one thing in religion, any fact or doctrine whatsoever, as a part of a great whole; so that, what all alone might seem needless, would appear very differently in its proper setting. The single stone might seem to be badly hewn by the workman because out of square, its upper sides a trifle wider than its lower. But when it is found that it was not intended to be a square block, but was slightly curved because it was proposed that it should fit into the span of an arch, the carelessness was seen to be carefulness, and the needlessness to be especially needful. Any intellectual objection to atonement must give way if we find moral need for it. We were, in our discussion, to judge of everything from the moral standpoint. In view of the facts we had before us at the

last interview—the facts of a deep, broad, universal sin-consciousness, I urged that the ideas of atonement, propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation, were at least relevant. Something of this kind was clearly demanded. In some form or other these or some similar facts were seen to be an absolute need. These were named as furnishing a natural necessary offset. In some such way, if ever, mankind must be delivered from the moral difficulties of its position. All hope of truth and right in religion must go, if man was to continue to be the subject of what Mr. Huxley so justly calls man's 'endless illusions.' We need redemption of mind from the errors of false religions as well as redemption of soul from personal sin and its righteous retributions. We need not only deliverance from misfortune, but the merit of atonement over against the demerit of sin. When one makes the assertion that atonement, in some form, and in some of its elements, is not necessary amid such moral facts, he flies in the face of an almost universal conviction. The immense consensus of human thinking affirms that, either by oneself or one's substitute, either by one's own vows, prayers, repentances, reformatations and virtues, or else by divine intervention, we must make or find some kind of an atonement."

He said: "If we are going to define atonement so broadly as that, I can have no objection to conceding the idea as eminently just and proper. If we are to take it in the dictionary sense as meaning reparation in some way, all must admit the principle."

I replied that reparation was only one of the many ideas involved in that word of immense breadth, the

word "atonement"; that we are now considering not the special fact of the Christian atonement, but the general idea denoted by the word itself. Penalty is certainly owed to law, and if penalty for sin is to be escaped there must be reparation of some sort. If sin is personal wrong-doing in reference to a duty owed to a personal God, then reparation is due to him as really as to any man whose rights our wrong-doing has injured. Toward God, as the First Being in the universe, to whom we are indebted for life and all that life involves, we owe far more of duty, and that of a far higher sort, than to husband or wife, than to neighbor or friend, than to the whole human race put together. Toward him, then, is done our greatest wrong. To him chiefly are due our amends. We owe him atonement, using now the word in its narrowest sense of reparation. However much in our acts we may have wronged others, the chief wrong therein was against God, and the chief reparation is due to him.

He said: "Men do not think about God when they do wrong, but only of their own gratification."

"Very true; and just there lies their sin, in that forgetfulness of God, when the remembrance of him should be the great undertone of every human life. If there were no God, the highest human duty would be self-gratification. But, when there is a God, and such a God, and we are so closely connected with him and under such immense obligations to him for all the blessings of life, and when we are so raised in faculty as to be capable of moral sympathy with him, for us to forget him, instead of an excuse, becomes an aggravation of our sin. What



would you think of a family, all the grown children of which were wholly dependent upon a noble father for an elegant home, a bountiful table, and a thousand luxuries, but who, as he came out and went in before them every day, was never addressed or even mentioned by them, neither having his wishes regarded nor even being thought of by them? Is it less wrong for one not to think of God, nor speak of him reverently, nor speak to him prayerfully?"

He asked: "Why, conceding that atonement, in the sense of reparation, is needed,—why may not a man make it himself by his repentance? When my boy does wrong and comes to me and confesses it, I freely forgive him. Why may not God do the same?"

"Well, there are circumstances in which repentance, considered as atonement, is enough. The case of your boy's penitence is one of them. But there are just as plainly circumstances where it is not only not enough, but where the repentance is not in the least degree a reparation. God would do as you do in the case of your son, if his only relation to you and to me was that of a Father. He will do the same when his other relations, which are just as real as that of Fatherhood, will permit him so to act. He does do the same when atonement removes the obstacles. Something hinders. If something did not hinder, not a man would be unforgiven on earth at this instant. You concede that one thing—lack of penitence—can hinder God's forgiveness of our sins. *That* atonement, you think, is needed. And until *that* atonement is made, you find a hindrance. Very well; it follows, then, that hindrance of some sort may exist. In point of fact, it

requires but little thought to see that there may be many other hindrances. There may even be some hindrances that we do not know. God may see hindrances still, when all the obstacles visible to us are removed. Perhaps we could not even understand them were he to tell us of those he sees. At any rate, there must be hindrances of a very grave nature, or the love of God might be relied upon that instantly and without any condition whatsoever on man's part, without even that penitential form of atonement for which you plead, every human soul would be instantly forgiven of God. We do know that, among many things which might be named, just law with its just penalty annexed, is a hindrance. No other century has so exalted the idea of law as has this nineteenth century. It has enthroned law in nature. Modern science puts the law of the fact into a greater prominence than the fact itself. But why stop with physical law? Once the royalty of law is conceded, moral law must be admitted to the kingly place among laws. Law is on the throne; this kind of law reigns sovereign over all laws. Law is always first. Even love is under law, or it would be lawless license. The king among laws is the law of right love—*i. e.*, the law of loving the holy. Any other dominating law than this law of love—*i. e.*, love for holiness—would be horrible as the law to which all others do obeisance. God, as highest Lawgiver, as Sovereign in the realm of absolute right, has something to say about the fit reparation if the penalty is to be remitted. He has something to say about moral satisfaction and the justice that must never be forgotten in its inexorable requirements. No thoughtful man would be willing to

receive 'forgiveness of sins' from a God who had acted simply by almightiness, who had acted apart from righteousness, who had acted outside of moral relations and duties; nor could such a God bestow 'forgiveness of sins,' since he would himself be culpable. God is a Father, but he is also a 'Holy Father'; and all just thought, especially all scientifically directed thought in our century, demands that emphasis shall be put upon law. But God is the maker of law and its administrator. 'The logical order of the universe,' cries one school of scientific thinkers. 'We must recognize a moral order in the universe,' cries another. God holds himself to law when a man thrusts his hand into the flame. That hand is burned, under law, though 'God is love.' God holds himself to law when, out at sea, some ship goes down, though the cry of the drowning mariners come up and appeals to his heart. It is better that he maintain the law than that he break the order and save the men. They perish, though 'God is love.' He is a Father; he could—forgetting now, as we may for a moment, all moral considerations—send a miracle to save them. He does not. There are, then, hindrances to his exercise of Fatherhood. The relation of parent to child is indeed very real; but it is not the only relation that God sustains to man. To argue from that relation *alone*, as some do about atonement, as some do about human sorrow here or hereafter, would be to prove that man cannot suffer sickness or be bereaved. Contrary to the facts all about us, it would be easy to argue from the divine Fatherhood alone that no man has ever died or will die. It might be urged that the Heavenly Father would never bring

death to man, his child, nor allow it to be brought. It is plain that God holds other relations to us than the paternal, and that only as these are considered and their demand for satisfaction, for propitiation, or for some form of reparation, are met, can the paternal feeling have scope in the forgiveness of sin, and the salvation of man be secured.

"Then, too, how many things there are for which repentance, considered as a reparation, can do no good. It cannot restore lost health to a man who has sinned against God's law in the body. It is right for him to repent; but it by no means restores lost years and a ruined constitution. Repentance does not snatch the dissipated man from the verge of the grave. It cannot repair the damage when a spendthrift has squandered his fortune. Repentance will not restore to life the father who went down dishonored to an untimely death because of a reckless child. The boy's repentance will not give him back the broken-hearted mother from the tomb. No more will the plea of repentance as a reparation avail at the bar of any court. It is one's duty to repent, but the point is that repentance is not a reparative atonement."

"Then why repent at all?" he asked, somewhat sharply.

"For other and very good reasons, of which I want to speak presently. But, now and here, the point is that, not in nature, or providence, or law, or medicine, or religion, does repentance make a reparative atonement."

"Why not?" said Mr. B——; "why not consider that, if a man starts out for right-doing, it will suffice, his right-doing being atonement enough?"

“For the same reasons, in general, that were named just now, when considering the idea that repentance would atone. One must be perfectly right in his right-doing to come up to present duty. What then becomes of the past? We can no more gain overplus by doing than by repenting.”

“Are you not too mathematical and mechanical, in talking in that way about overplus and deficit?” he said.

“Am I any more so than when talking about any other kind of law—say natural law, or civil law? Law has always, and in every species of it, to do with equivalents, and measurements, and fulfillments, and satisfactions. Exactly as we are to repent, not for the purpose of making an atonement thereby, so we are to live rightly, but not to gain merit therefor. Christianity provides for ‘right living’ in the deepest, broadest, highest sense of that phrase; showing as it does, the way to obtain what it calls a ‘new heart.’ And this new heart—*i. e.*, new-heartedness toward God in view of the work of Christ for us, is the basis of right moral living. So that Christianity in offering to us another kind of reparation than repentance, insists upon the fairness of a penitential atonement, and equally on the utter fruitlessness of our meritorious obedience to meet our mistaken and guilty past.”

“Then why not,” he said, “have in the mercy of God an atonement—his general mercy outside of any such system as that of Christianity?”

“My dear Mr. B——,” I said, “you have come at last to the region of thought where alone atonement is possible—that of the divine mercy. But you greatly mistake

the gravity of the situation when you think of the general rather than the special mercy of God as meeting the emergency. There are whole realms of God's universe in which there is no atonement, though God be merciful. There is no atonement in nature. There is none in providence. Every mistake you make in the game of life is watched and made the most of by 'the invisible player who sits on the other side of the table.' There is no condoning, no atoning, no forgiving. The unfailing eye watches every move and takes every advantage. There is nothing so pitiless as law. It goes right on revolving, no matter who is crushed as the wheel makes its round. It is love that makes law and stands by it. It is the mercy of God which has given us a system of fixed laws in the natural and the moral world, so that men may have something on which to depend. There is exhibited in nature and in morals the mercy of a kind but just judge, who will be as merciful as possible in every decision; merciful toward the prisoner at his bar; merciful in admitting to the utmost all extenuations, all favorable pleas, all possible reasons for kindest judgments; merciful in giving the lightest sentences; merciful in deferring as long as possible the execution of the penalty; merciful in that he feels often more keenly than the criminal the painfulness of the situation, and is more compassionate toward him than the man is toward himself. But none of these forms of mercy step in between law and its penalty. None of them secure what you and I so much need, the forgiveness of sins. The general mercy of God has no way of meeting the case of a man who has done wrong. We want *special* mercy. 'God so loved the



world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' It is not only reparation,—the idea you have owned,—and satisfaction to the moral craving of divine righteousness, but it is substitution."

He quickly responded: "Now you name an element in the Christian atonement especially objectionable to me. I cannot believe in the dogma that character can be transferred or transfused; that Christ's character can be transferred to us or ours to him, or that his personality can be put in any way into ours. Calvin's idea of the 'transference of merits,' and Osiander's idea of the 'transfusion of the divine essence into man,' are both mere speculations to me. Each man stands or falls for himself. Any other view violates every conviction of personality and justice. This whole idea of treating an innocent man as if guilty, and then a guilty man as if innocent, is in every way objectionable."

"You forget," I said, "your old plea of heredity, used in our last conversation, as a reason for not holding men personally guilty of sin. That heredity is always a case of transferred character. We call it transmission. And though, in the case of parent and child the transmitting of the qualities and results of paternal conduct is not an atonement, yet no believer in heredity can claim that the transference of something from Christ to his followers is either impossible or contrary to just analogy. The best Christian thinking holds to substitution and transference—but not of character. A transferring of the results of character is what we see every day. And it is this which is claimed in Christianity. Penalty and



blessing are alike transferable. Christ's sorrow and service in their results can be given to us. Every time a man gives a penny to a beggar, there is a transfer of the results of a man's toil to meet the needs of the mendicant. All forms of social and business life build themselves up about the idea of voluntary substitution of one thing for another, of transfer of results. In the transfer of the substituted penalty to Christ, the substituted person, no wrong is done to him, provided always he is a voluntary offering. And in any transfer to us of the blessings given to him for his obedience and suffering by his Father, there is no wrong done to us, provided there are the righteous requirements of a penitent forsaking of sin and a compliance with the claims of right living. Who is harmed? Not God. Not Christ. Not the interests of righteousness. Not the man made better by receiving, under these requirements, the results of Christ's righteous work for him.

"But," I continued, "I am not satisfied merely to defend this idea of substitution from objection. I want to enter a claim in behalf of Christianity that we have here a most unique presentation. We have a substituted person who is a unique character, and also a substituted sorrow for the penalty due to sin. The person substituted is not only a unique being in that he is the Son of God and Son of man, but in that he is a holy substitute. The idea of vicarious substitution is inwrought in all the thinking of the ages. But the propitiations of the old nations often missed the idea of a holy propitiator. A wicked man suffering the penalty of his guilt is not making atonement for other sins. Only a spotless being, only

the absolutely perfect Christ, the Son of God and Son of man, can so go beyond the bounds of personal duty as to secure atoning virtue for the remission of others' transgressions. So, too, the sorrow of the atoner must not be *guilty* sorrow. All the guilty sorrows of a guilty world have not the least degree of atoning grace in them. Not punishment for sin, but suffering for sin by a holy Christ, propitiates and reconciles. And we have in the Christ of Christianity not only a holy substituted personage, but we have also a holy substituted sorrow that God accepts instead of that guilty sorrow which is the natural result of sin. Christianity differs, by the whole diameter of human thought, from every other system in its grasp of the atoning idea."

"But," he said, with a good deal of energy, "this whole conception of salvation as purchased with blood, I find utterly repulsive."

"And yet your political salvation and mine has been blood-bought. Your freedom and mine has been purchased with the blood of heroic men in the days of the war. And you and I glory in the fact that our freedom is worth so much the more because of the blood shed for its maintenance. What the Bible says of the old ceremonies of Judaism can be said of our liberties: 'Almost all things are purged with blood.' You and I know full well that no good cause has ever succeeded except as men died for it. Not a worthy principle, not a single step in the world's advancement has there been, but through the laying down of life for it. And everywhere else but in religion men glory in the fact that their greatest gains are made worthy, just in proportion to the

blood, by the shedding of which those blessings have been secured. The sneer at Christianity that it is a 'blood theology,' comes with poor grace from those who boast of a flag baptized in the blood of brave men. We build for our patriotic dead their deserved monuments, and we give them perpetual place in our hearts. Mr. B——, you are a man too well informed to join in the sneer against a blood-bought redemption when even liberty itself, as you have read its story, has never achieved a success except as it has been redeemed from tyranny by the shedding of noble blood. We honor the martyrs of every great cause. We do the martyrs of liberty and of science no dishonor when we also claim that this self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the world's redemption was one 'of nobler worth and richer blood than they.' And so far is this idea of life coming through death, and victory through blood, and blessing to others through individual sacrifice of life from being an unusual thing, that the world is full of examples of it. For, though there has been but one transaction worthy of being called *the* atonement, some of these separate ideas which this atonement involves are universally recognized among men."

I continued: "There is still another view of sacrifice and suffering in the Christian system. Not only is Jesus Christ a redeemer from penalty by a substituted sorrow, but he shows, by giving up life, that we, too, morally are to give up our worldly, unsympathetic and so evil life, laying that life down, as he laid his life down. There is an example and an inspiration to self-surrender to God, even to the extremity of death. The shed blood of Christ

means atonement before God, but it means *at-one-ment* with him. It means that a man takes God's sense of what sin is as his own sense of it; so that he is redeemed from his old way of thinking and feeling about it. It means that, as God accepts Christ's sacrifice as an atonement, so, because of it, God will also accept our service of sacrifice—not indeed as an atonement, but as an act of gratitude bringing us into harmony with God through Jesus his Son. So that atonement is not a truth dead and embalmed for the creed, but a live truth producing a new and better life in the man who accepts it with his whole heart. Our salvation is thus a blood-bought thing, and our service is also blood-bought. Everywhere else men put honor on a cause, a truth that is sanctified by blood; that fact being not a reproach but a boast and an exultation. The orator proclaims it on the natal day of our American Independence, and the poet sings of the flag baptized in blood; and the survivors, on Decoration Day, put new wreaths on their comrades' graves who bought us anew the political blessings we enjoy, by shedding their blood on a hundred battle fields."

He seemed surprised at this presentation of the matter, saying that it was new to him. Presently he added: "The analogy is just. Atonement is not such an absurd thing as I had thought it. I shall never hear a man sneering at a bloody theology without asking him 'how about blood-bought liberty?'" A moment more and he added: "Yes, the Christ of Christianity is a nobler personage because he has shed his blood for his principles."

I added. "And nobler still, in that he has shed his

blood, not only for his principles, but for men,—for all men,—for you and for me. And we need just that atonement. I do. I think you do, as well. For we want some broad, clear way of seeing that God righteously can forgive and save us.” I added: “Let me pray, and will you join in spirit, if not in word, with me in the prayer, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’” I knelt. He was visibly moved, and I commended him as well as myself to God’s mercy in Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER XII.

### REVELATION AGREEING WITH FACT.

AT our next interview Mr. B—— said: “I have been thinking over your argument of these last few weeks with a good deal of interest. I see your aim. It is certainly a novel way of presenting the evidences of Christianity—novel to me. You are showing that the scheme which passes under that name is consistent with itself and with our human needs, and so that it *ought* to be true. Your plan gives me no chance at specific objections. But it has this advantage for you,”—he paused and then added,—“and for me, also, that we can study the system as a whole. And I am free to say that a good many of my general objections have been met. Perhaps I ought also to say I have seen the spirit of the system; and I am coming to admit that some difficulties about specific doctrines and facts appear in a wholly new light. They are carried by the scheme as a whole. One or two of them are advantages rather than disadvantages. I am getting to see the scope and aim of Christianity. To use your figure, it looks more and more as if the key fitted the lock. I am willing to concede that it is this or it is no religion. It is, for me, a pretty strong doctrinal Christianity, or none at all. The religion that can do us any good must come from God, and so will be likely to have in it some pretty strong things for us to believe. The truth is, I have always rejected the facts on which

the doctrines seemed to me to be founded, and so I have scouted the doctrines. But some of these doctrines come out of human needs, and others of them meet our human wants to a surprising degree. Christianity, if true, accounts for a good many things; and, as a theory, it agrees well with them."

I quoted Bushnell's words: "Every hypothesis that gathers in, accommodates and assimilates all the facts of a subject, gives, in that one test, the most satisfactory and convincing evidence of its practical truth. The most difficult questions of science are determined in this manner. Here is a wide hypothesis of the world and the great problem of life, and sin, and supernatural redemption, and Christ, and a Christly providence, and a divinely certified history, which liquidates these stupendous facts at issue between Christians and unbelievers, and gives a rational account of them. The points of detail are intelligible only in a way of comprehension, or as being seen in the whole to which they are subordinate."

He said: "You have taken the method suggested by Bushnell, in your argument. But if it be as he says, why cannot we have a Christianity with some of its miraculous elements left out? I begin to think I could accept Christianity with those features eliminated. Cannot we regard it as true apart from miracles?"

I said: "I am afraid we cannot do that. I am not sure that, when it comes to a closer examination, you will want to do it. As the doctrines have changed their faces, and smile on you where they used to frown, so, I am fairly sure, it will be when we get down close to the facts of this religion. I think you will not want your



Hamlet with Hamlet left out. I think you will require these supernatural facts. The system would be full of gaps without them. You would be ready to object to it as sadly lacking, if we could eliminate them. I will not say it would be lacking in proof without them, for I do not hold them so much to be the proofs of the system as its natural expression. They are less root, and more blossom and fruitage. Miracles are less basal, and more the natural development of Christianity. They are so far evidences of it, as they show themselves to be a part of it. They are less proofs, than manifestations of it. They are not so much 'evidences of Christianity,' as they are exhibitions, in physical fact, of its inward spirit. Miracles are doctrinal teachings in physical expression. They are the words of Jesus recast in material facts. Jesus Christ, if he was the being claimed by Christianity, and was here on his alleged mission, must sometimes have used miracles. They would burst through and 'show forth his glory,' just as a plant in which there are imprisoned all the qualities and colors that make up the flower, must burst into blossom in spring time. For him not to use miracles sometimes is as incredible as for him never to use words."

"But there is so much that is falsely claimed as miraculous in the world."

"True," I said, "but I want you to see on close examination that this peculiar religion has its own kind of miracle. I want you to see the 'setting' of these miracles, in the teaching that always accompanied them, that always demanded them, that was always illustrated by them, and that makes them possible with God and

credible with man. This kind of religion has this kind of miracle. It is always in harmony with time and place, with worker and audience, with conditions and environments. Not one of these could exchange places with any other. A miracle of the third year of Christ could hardly occur in the first year. They are timed. They are assorted in character. They are in harmony with the exact points of Christ's developments of truth where they occur. Their occasion is their justification. Seeing them as they are becomes their proof. They are an intellectual and moral necessity, when seen where they were wrought, and when one sees what end they serve. And the New Testament record of them is exactly in accord with what now we can see ought to have occurred. Something like these events must needs be in the career of a Christ. They become him. Their absence from the record would be a suspicious circumstance. We should know that something of this sort would occur, and we should wonder why they were omitted from the Gospels. For such things, at such a time, and in such a career, and under such circumstances, would be both natural and necessary. They would spring spontaneously into being, in such a work as that which such a Christ came to perform.

"Now let us come to close quarters about these New Testament miracles. And I begin by saying that a supernatural personage, like the one claimed by Christianity for its Christ, ought to be expected to do some such miracles as these recorded in the Gospels. If this New Testament is not the record of them, where shall we find the story of the occurrences we have a right to ex-

pect? Granted, as we have both done, the need of a supernatural person to rid us of the 'endless illusions' of religious mistake, and from the guilt of human sin—some such miracles as these from his hand are matters of course. And I do not see how, granting the need of a supernatural person, one can logically object to his supernatural actions. I am going to let you select some of the alleged miracles of Jesus, and we will examine them together as closely as you wish."

He responded instantly by saying there was no doubt where the chief trouble was for men in his position. He said: "My difficulties are in the story of Christ's birth, and equally in the story of his resurrection. Show me that these are fairly credible, and I am ready to admit any other miraculous thing claimed as occurring between the two." A moment after he added: "But this calls, as a preliminary question, for proof of the inspiration of the Bible, which is the source of our knowledge of the two allegations."

"Begging your pardon," I replied, "I must take issue with you there. I believe in the inspiration of the Bible, but these two facts would be exactly the same if the Bible were not inspired. All we want for our purposes now in this discussion is a fairly credible book; that precisely the same credence be given to its statements as to any other historic narration. That whole matter of the credibility of historic evidence, we have gone over in a previous interview; and we do not need to open it at all to-day. For certain other purposes the inspiration of the Scriptures is of very great importance. But in settling these two facts, we can dismiss it entirely. What

we want here is simply good, honest, credible statements of contemporary historians, giving us a fair record of things about which they had knowledge in their day."

He said: "Well, taking the thing as it is usually held by Christians, there is about Christ's birth a mystery. Here is a child that had no human father, but only a human mother, and that mother a virgin. The story seems not only incredible, but there is a mythical air about it, a mediæval flavor to it. There is an air of unreality about the whole thing. There is the angel announcing it, and other angels who come to the shepherds—the whole thing has an improbable atmosphere. It is removed by its whole character from the sphere of sober history. If I were a defender of Christianity I should want to rid it of that incubus. I would drop out those circumstances that are so unnatural even to grotesqueness. But, then," he added after a moment, "I do not see how you can do it, and yet retain any reverence for the Bible. Christianity seems to me to be handicapped by that story."

"Yes," I said, "Christianity does stand or fall with the story of the birth, and that of the resurrection. And so far from wanting to drop out the peculiar birth, if I can only get you to see it through the right moral atmosphere—and no fact can be truly seen apart from its own atmosphere—I shall have you rejoicing at the historical incarnation as a great moral fact. For, though the outward part of the fact is of a material sort, *the* fact is a moral one. When a man sees it externally and outside of all its real relations and apart from its true environments, it appears to be incredible. Nor do I

wonder that, taken entirely out of its connections, it looks as it does to you. Our work is to get for the fact its own moral environment; to surround it by its true and vital atmosphere; to see the things it matches, not only historically, but intellectually and morally; to find, if we can, the need of it, and the purpose it serves, alike in the great world history and in that of individual souls.

“Let us start with the truth we have conceded all along, the need of some such personage as Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, if we are to get any certainty in religion; any mental or moral salvation for the race or for the man; if we are to get rid of these ‘endless illusions’ in religious beliefs. He must be a supernatural person. A perfect man he must be, as we have seen before; and we must remember what that involves for a man in a sinning race, viz., another and a divine nature conjoined with the human. No other key fits the lock. But how is this supernatural and yet natural person to get among us men? Why object to the idea that a supernatural being should come to us in a supernatural way?”

He said: “You miss the point of my difficulty. I object to the story of the *birth*. If such a being is to appear, why not have him come suddenly in dignity, and in all dignity depart when his work is done? The story is too human, with a kind of fantastic and mediæval humanness, for this nineteenth century easily to credit. It seems as if this story of the birth was a kind of myth that after centuries might have hung about the real Jesus.” He added soon, “I have no proof of this, and yet I frankly tell you just how it seems to me.”

"Thanks for your frankness," I said, "but how would it do to go through human history in that *ad captandum* style and meet in that way any one of its facts—especially a fact like this one that has given its date to the centuries, and changed the whole course of human thinking and acting?" He admitted that he had no proof for his suggestion, and that such a method of dealing with secular facts was not to be considered for a moment. "Then why let such a suggestion have force enough even to be mentioned here?"

"Simply because we have in this Christ a supernatural being."

"Very well, then. Let us remember that mystery is to be expected in the advent of a mysterious being. Let us keep ourselves in the moral atmosphere of things while we study the physical manifestation of a moral fact. We are asking about the probabilities that such a person will come into the race in some such way as the Gospels allege. Now, what if we find that this kind of mysterious birth is exactly befitting the commencement of such a career as that depicted in the Gospels. The story is fitly introduced by the birth. Of course, the narrative would be utterly unbecoming an ordinary child. But this is no ordinary child. Here is the problem: Wanted; in some suitable way, God, incarnate in humanity. Wanted; one who should be the God-man, one in the race-bond with us. Is there any more reasonable way, any more credible, any better way, for the accomplishment of this than that claimed for Jesus in the Gospels? Had he been sent as an angel, he could not have met our needs. Nor could he as a newly created man. The



needed one must be a member of our race. The Christ for us must come into our race in one way only—by birth. For the race is no less one than each man is one. We are feeling, through the race-bond, the sad influence of heredity. The trouble, through this heredity, runs back to some Adam, presumably our Adam of the Bible. There is certainly an evil inheritance of suffering, through each man's connection with the race. Disease of body is certainly a fact. Your sickness, my dear sir, is not due to yourself. Your particular disease is hereditary. It comes on you through others. You are sick through inherited bodily taint. That fact admitted, no thoughtful man can object to the parallel facts, the companion facts of intellectual and moral heredity. The acceptance of the one is the acceptance, logically, of the others. Indeed, we may say that the bodily heredity of suffering, for the body is only the smallest part of our inheritance of trouble. The root of all is sin of soul; and in the moral domain the mischief is mainly evident. The body is only the sympathetic instrument of the 'me within.' Thousands, trying to be better men, have felt this inward drift of a sinning nature. A power within has held them back and down. They have been inwardly hindered from following the higher and the nobler."

He hastened to say: "I believe that. I believe in an evil heredity. It is the worst foe of many a man,—perhaps of every man." He added after a moment: "It is a bad plight we men are in."

"Yes, and the cure must come as came the disease, by some person entering the race with an elevating power as an offset to the power of the depravity that came from



some Adam—presumably our biblical Adam. Our human nature must be taken on and lifted up by the Holy One of God. Downward the first Adam carries us, as we yield to sin—every sin being a sin ‘after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.’ The second Adam, the Lord from heaven, lifts us, as we take hold of all righteousness through his Spirit.”

I added: “You see that in some such way as this, it must come, if salvation mentally and morally comes at all. And when we turn from the region of theory to the New Testament story of Christ’s birth, we have another of these instances in which the key fits the lock. A Scripture writer claims for our Christ that he took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham. The Christ that meets our case must not only come by the way of birth into the race, but he must be a person with an individual consciousness. He must be a single and separate person ‘like unto his brethren’ of the race; a partaker of our common nature, and yet, as we are distinct beings, so it must be with the ideal Christ, and so it is with the actual Christ of the Gospels. He must be in the race and of the race. And all this is just the scientific doctrine of heredity conjoined with that of personality, and the demand is met perfectly in the Christ of Christianity. Further, it is humanity conjoined with divinity that we need, and which the religion of Christ claims to furnish.

“To all this there is one usual answer, ‘It is mysterious.’ Of course it is. That is the claim. As well object to the truth that it is true, as to the mysterious that there is mystery about it. There ought to be mystery when

we consider the human need. There is when we consider the way in which the need is met. Nothing else, having the name of a religion, claims anything of this sort. It is this or it is nothing. It is this happy solution, or man is necessarily the sport of 'endless illusions,' and is hopelessly involved in the consequential penalties of sin. A human birth of the world's Redeemer, a superhuman birth for a superhuman Redeemer, an incarnation in humanity of God—this is the wisdom of God and the love of God in profoundest expression. Take it all in all, was the announcement to the virgin mother out of harmony with the event announced? Who better to be selected than this modest maiden, in a holy household, descended from the royal line, her heart so imbued with religion that she breaks forth into a song that takes up the best strains of Hebrew poetry, interpreting them with a marvelous insight and spirituality? Where better to have the Christ born than in Palestine, the coveted land of all the older nations, fronting by its position the three continents of the world, and skirting the shores of that Mediterranean Sea, about which all ancient history gathers itself? What time in the world's history so favorable to the testing of its truthfulness as that Augustan age, when 'the science of evidence' was as well developed as it is to-day? It was not a credulous age. It was preceded by credulity. It was followed by a credulous time. But that age was incredulous in tone, even to scepticism. The gods and goddesses had fallen in the popular estimation. There was Sadduceeism with its doubts about the supernatural, and Phariseeism with its absorption in ceremonies and its satisfaction with the

mere moralities of its religion. Predisposition to believe in this birth of Christ there was none. It was the last thing to be invented, the least credible of things to be believed. Yet it obtained for itself credit, in that land, in that age, among those men. The detailed account of the evangelists serves two purposes. It shows the importance they attached to this supernatural introduction into the world of a supernatural person. It shows also, in its careful recital of the circumstances connected with the birth, their simple honesty of record. The details carry with them the air of absolute history. The circumstances all help the event, and are in simple dignified harmony with it. The historical and the moral not only match each other, but they meet and mingle; and you cannot omit a recorded detail without absolute loss to the whole impression of the fact. In some way this mysterious being came into the world. Coming in any other way he would be a failure. Not an atom of proof that he came in any other way has ever been furnished. It would have been easy to show the essential falsity of the story, could that have been done. It would have been done had that been possible. It was a story instantly declared. In those 'oral gospels,' in which the story was told over and over again by the accredited disciples, it must have been given. The Orientals to this day tell the Koran story, though the story tellers often cannot read a word of that book, with the most marvelous exactness. These disciples told it as Homer's story was told by the Greek minstrels. These oral recitals preceded by a few years the written Gospels. For that oral method was the method of the time. In those 'recitals,' so careful, so exact, great

stress would be put on this mysterious birth. For instant inquiry would be made as to who he was, and when and where born, and what circumstances attended his birth. Enemies as well as friends would ask these questions, and any silence, any hesitation, any discrepancy here, would be fatal. To show that the facts were otherwise than stated, was the easiest way to destroy the new religion. It would only be necessary to show that the child was born in no remarkable way, under none other than ordinary circumstances. Nothing of the kind was ever done. For if done, the story of it would have lived. And when, to keep enemies from perverting the life of the Lord, the oral gospel was committed to writing, it would have been impossible to insert any circumstance about that birth in the well-known story without raising the cry of fraud among the enemies of the faith. Nor was there time for the least myth to gather around the story of a common man's birth—not now to urge that the birth introduced into life no common man. Myths take time, and time between the oral and the written Gospels was wanting; nor could a myth have been inserted any more than you could insert one to-day without instant detection and exposure. The honest virgin mother holds 'these things in her heart' until after his death. She tells the facts. From her lips they repeat it, possibly they make written note of it. They give her version over and over again. They do exactly as did the Greek singers, who without a manuscript, but only by the hearing of the ear, sang songs that have come down to us, in which a single misplaced word or one wrong accent would have been detected in a moment."

He said : "I see that fraud or misstatement by others would have been impossible. But the whole story of anything miraculous about the birth depends on Mary's assertion."

"And who should better know about her child than the child's own mother? And in the Gospels she is by no means alone. There is Joseph, her reputed husband, who knew all about the story and clung to her. There are Elisabeth her relative, and Simeon and Anna of the temple. There are the genealogical tables as to the royal descent. There are the facts of the subsequent life fitly introduced by such a birth. There is the uncontradicted testimony of men who knew him, knew his mother, knew those who were close to her, and who, all the days of her life, gave her a home in their own households. The wise men knew whether they did or did not come to his manger. The people knew whether there was or was not, as oral and written gospels said, a massacre at Bethlehem, and whether the wise men did or did not return to Herod. The hearers of this gospel story of the birth knew whether the written and the spoken story agreed each with the other; they also knew whether there was or was not a man, who, doing these open wonders, came among men in a wonderful way. The simple, straightforward story, moving right on with calm, easy flow, tells of mysterious as well as ordinary things, and the incidents of the birth bear traces of the same hand in their record as does the story of the wonderful life. It fits with all the rest we know about him. It agrees with the idea elsewhere gained of him. There is no intrusion, no excrescence about it. It becomes the subsequent life.

It fits the ideal. It fits the need. It fits them both. It stands historically related. It is morally needful and divinely eloquent as a testimony of God. It ought to be true. It is true. All before and after demands it, and confirms it. There were a hiatus in history without it. The key fits the very intricate wards of the lock. These combinations are as wonderful as are the facts themselves. Have I not, my dear sir, a right to ask your acceptance of them, and of this record of them in the Bible?"

He waited some time before answering my direct question. Slowly and very deliberately he said: "You are asking a good deal from me. I foresee that conceding this, I shall be obliged to go on and concede a good deal more. It is certainly very singular that the whole matter should have so changed front to me within the last few weeks. The thing is wholly unlike what I thought it to be. It begins to seem not only reasonable, but right—right that there should be attention to such claims. I would not quite like to say that I do really concede the question. But I do find a great change in my feelings toward Christianity."

I said: "Why do you use the word 'concede,' as though there was a grudging assent to an unwelcome truth? It is the gladdest possible truth, if true at all. I am as much interested to have it true as you are, and you as I. We both ought to hope it is true that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.' We are profoundly interested to have this true."

He said: "Through life I have felt just the other way. All my wish has been to find it untrue."

“ But why so ? ”

“ I cannot tell ; but I have always been hospitable to objections. Anything that looked like a difficulty I have welcomed. I have felt as if Christianity was trying to prove something against us, rather than, as now I see it, to do something for us. I had no right to make that mistake.”

It was time for the interview to close, and commending him once more to God in a few words of prayer, I left him.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE NEW LIFE.

MR. B—— was to-day in a peculiar mood. He pointed to a newly purchased Bible on his table, and said: "I sent out and bought a serviceable copy. I had a 'Triglot Evangelist, Interlinear'—Greek, Latin and English,—which covered the four Gospels, but no complete copy of the New Testament." Seeing my look of surprise, he added, "Wife and the children have their copies. I haven't owned, for myself, a complete New Testament, until within a week."

I could not help saying, "Is that fair?"

"No," he answered. "I've taken what I know about the Bible at second hand. I obtained this copy, however, not for purposes of controversy. I wanted to see if the key fits the lock. But"—in a hesitating way—"I hardly know where to begin."

I advised him to obtain a broad view of the teachings of Jesus by a rapid reading of the Gospel of Mark. He could read it in a couple of hours. It would give him a comprehensive view of the relations of one part with another of Christ's career, and his progressive revelations of the truth about God's kingdom. He took his Bible, turned down a leaf at Mark's Gospel, and promised the hasty reading I had advised. Reading it now in the new moral atmosphere in which he was coming to see Christianity, he would find it, I told him, not only a new book, but

there would be a growing belief that Jesus was an actual person, a supernatural being, who meets exactly our needs as Teacher and Saviour; furthermore, he would find an increasing proof, not only of the trustworthiness, but of the inspiration of the record. He would feel its fitness, and find himself assuming its absolute truthfulness, as almost self-evident. There was no other such proof of the Bible as the Bible itself. It was its own best argument, studied honestly, and in the moral atmosphere it engendered.

He said: "Let me add one qualification, viz., that a man shall have moral earnestness—a mood of mind that men do not always possess. If I were not somewhat in that mood, I should not ask you to defer the subject of to-day's conversation. I see"—looking at some notes I had on a sheet of paper—"that you are ready to take up Christ's resurrection, as our theme. But I want you to postpone that matter to-day, and help me get at the teachings of Christ on one or two subjects."

On indicating my willingness so to do, he stopped a few moments as if in great embarrassment. At length, as he saw that I waited for him, he said: "Nothing that we have talked over more impresses me than this moral side of the subject. When we began these conversations it was not so. To me the object was argument, largely to beguile the tedium of these hours of enforced confinement in the house. As we have gone on, it would be too much, perhaps, to say that your views have converted me from all my former opinions—if indeed I had any views worthy of being called opinions, on so serious a matter. I certainly had no convictions on the subject

except that I was thoroughly opposed to any one else having any intellectual right to positive convictions. But I have certainly come now to feel that instead of sneering at men's errors and sins, we men are in a very bad plight. I feel more like commiserating men and pitying them. It is not a matter for sneering. I confess to a degree of moral earnestness about these questions. When you began to use that phrase 'moral earnestness,' I thought it a kind of religious cant. But it is just the right phrase. Certain great questions are pressing on me now, and I want to know how Jesus answered them. And I have sent out and gotten this Bible so as to put my own finger on his words about these things. I have very little skill in finding what I might want; and perhaps you can help me to the exact utterances of Jesus Christ on these questions."

I told him that I was at his service in searching for the verses. Taking a slip of paper from his table he read as follows: "What does Jesus say about our entanglement, and about getting out of it?" "What does he say about forgiveness of sins?" "What about the world beyond?"

He began on the first of his topics by remarking: "I believe in evil heredity and in evil environment. I believe we are all tangled up in the thick meshes of this net. And I see no way of getting out of it. We are self-doomed. The thing is not only on us but in us. The way out—that is the question—if there is, indeed, a way out. We seem to be imprisoned in ourselves as well as in our situation; and there is no escape."

He stopped, and a spasm of pain contorted his features. I rose to do what I could to relieve him, and offered to

send in his attendant, and take my own leave. He would listen to neither. Would I wait a few minutes; his spasm would pass and he would be as well as usual. He leaned back wearily in his chair, and I allowed him to rest as long as he wished.

He resumed the conversation by saying: "You see my disease furnishes a good illustration of what I mean. I have to sit and take it. It is on, and it is in me. In the same way, I think, we are all entangled in error and wrong, and what I want to know is whether there is any way of getting out of this evil environment and heredity. If some one would get me out of this bodily doom, I would be glad. But I fear there is no chance of that."

I said: "We were going to-day to talk of Christ's resurrection, with some reference also to our own, when we are to have the perfect body. But you wished to discuss another theme. We have that in reserve."

He said: "I have sometimes thought that if Christ had any help for men's souls he would first help men's bodies."

To which I responded: "That is just what he did in the miracles recorded in the Gospels. He did just what you see he ought, in your conception of him, to do. Please remember that concession of yours when we come to examine the New Testament miracles. Meanwhile, let us remember that the historic order for the race would be death preceding a new and perfect resurrection-body. Christ's healings showed power and gave hints meanwhile. That was all he could do historically at that time. Now, in these centuries, man's chief trouble is not physical but moral ailment. You are right in asking

whether there is any way of getting out of the moral entanglement, and so in the end, of gaining a better life for both soul and body. I believe heredity along the line of ill can be matched by heredity of an opposite kind, and environments of evil by a new and holy environment. I want to read to you—or, rather let you read for yourself—what Jesus said on that matter.” I put into his hand his Bible, open at John’s Gospel, third chapter, the third verse, and asked him to read it slowly and carefully aloud, and to think while reading it that he had in those words Christ’s answer to him on that question. He read distinctly, pausing at each clause, the words: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He looked at the marginal reference, and then substituting the words “from above” for the word “again,” he read the text thus: “Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He seemed to ponder the words a moment, and then made this one word of comment, “Mysterious!”

“Precisely so,” I said, “and that is what the auditor of Jesus said, nineteen hundred years ago. Please read the next verse.” He read: “Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old?” Read also the eighth verse. He read: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

He said: “This does not tell us *what* it is, but only *that* it is. The words ‘born again’ and ‘born from above’ must be a figure of speech.

"You are saying again," I replied, "what Christ's auditor said. In one sense all our religious and moral words are figures of speech. For they are all derived from physical things. Our word 'soul' meant the 'breath'; but since what breathes lives, it came to mean the physical life of the body; and since, when we have bodily life, there is an inner life of thought and feeling, the word 'soul' came at length to denote the spiritual nature in man. It is the same with our word 'heaven,' meaning at first 'the heaved up,' and as the sky seems heaved up over the earth, it meant the firmament; and as, morally, we think of the home of God and the holy as above us, so we call the holy, happy world by the name of 'heaven.' Such words lose their physical in their moral and technical sense. And so the term 'born again' or 'regeneration' has as definite a use in religion as has the word 'gravitation' in the realm of nature. But we can see how the old meaning still abides in the newly used term, 'regeneration.' When we were born, a new being was ushered into a new world. These new lungs first breathed in a new atmosphere."

I paused, for I saw he was doing his own thinking, and not following my thought. At length he said: "I thought these words of Christ were quoted as proof of your religious doctrine of a 'change of heart.' But I do not so understand Christ in them." I said: "They are not interpreted correctly when so used. The idea is not change but newness. They declare that a new principle of moral life begins its existence amid the faculties of the soul, and uses them for its ends—very much as what we term 'the vital force' uses this organism of the body.

A new kind of moral life is in some way engendered in the soul. We start in a new heredity. For this life begins when the soul uses its immense faculty of trusting one higher than itself, Jesus Christ. This same chapter—the third of John—tells us how Jesus would have Nicodemus enter, by this new spiritual birth, into the kingdom of God. Will you also read aloud verses sixth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth?” He read very deliberately as follows: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. . . . As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

“You will notice,” I continued, “that the beginning is the Holy Spirit of God. We are ‘born of the Spirit.’ The method, so far as we in our freedom act, is by ‘believing’—*i. e.*, the influential faith of the heart. We thus, at the moment of the soul’s profound trusting in this Saviour, are regenerated by this Spirit of God, born into the new heredity. We become, morally, members of a new kingdom, ‘the kingdom of God.’ The new-born man begins to breathe in the new atmosphere of new moral fact. These gospel truths are the new environment for the new life begun in the soul.”

He remarked: “For the first time in my life the doctrine of Jesus Christ about the new birth seems reasonable and right. When I add to the fact of the necessity of something of this sort, the fact that Jesus said



just these words about a new kind of life, the thing wears a new aspect to me. It implies, however, a good deal which one rather hesitates to admit, viz., that we have a hard, dead central spot in our souls that needs this newly given life."

"How else can you account for the facts of man's moral history? By his reason and conscience drawn toward acknowledging God, and by some other and some controlling power more central still, driven away from God, he needs down in this central soul a new life-spring, a better moral impulse, a new kinship of vital feeling—in short, he needs what the New Testament describes as a 'heart created anew in Jesus Christ.' On this point, I want you to see what Jesus himself says. Perhaps, you will read for me the tenth verse of the tenth chapter of John's Gospel."

He read: "I am come that they might have *life*, and that they might have it more abundantly." He added, "I can see that this is what is wanted, new vitality, something within, to make a man alive to these things. I seem to see that it is so, but there is a further need. That gift of a new inward moral vitality is the great desideratum. It is mysterious to me, but it is a mystery in the right direction. The truth evidently lies along that way. I am certainly getting a little moral light on these things."

I asked him if he would turn to John's Gospel, the eighth chapter and twelfth verse. He did so, and read: "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the *light of life*."

He remarked, as if in a partial self-application of the

words of Jesus, "I hardly see how I could follow him in my situation."

To which I replied: "My dear sir, you are now consulting his word, and are ready to hear what he says and carefully weigh his meaning. Is not that, in so far, following him?"

He replied that he had not thought of it in that way, but had been drawn along insensibly to consult the teachings of Christ. And I reminded him that it was exactly so with men when Christ was on earth. He drew men's attention by the wonderful words which proceeded out of his mouth. He is the life-giver as we give credit to his words, and there comes with this trust in him and his utterances, a kind of inward moral conviction that this is the true way. He has given us nothing to gratify our mere curiosity, but everything for our real inward life. As we trust more and more, with a kind of inner trustfulness, yielding to him his place of teacher, we find a living satisfaction. We have hold of a safe and sure hand. Trusting him becomes a mental mood; thus saving a man's intellect as well as his soul. A man gains an inward freedom, a kind of salvation from the bondage of those "endless illusions" described by your friend, Mr. Huxley. "Please read two verses more. They are found in John's Gospel, the thirty-second and thirty-sixth verses of the eighth chapter."

While he was finding them he said: "All your references to-day are to John's Gospel; and yet you wanted me to read Mark. How is that? I am a good deal inclined to read John in the rapid way you named."

"By all means read John, if you feel inclined to do so.

When you want to hear Jesus on the vital things of his teaching—those which bring his words home to the soul's deepest needs—take John. But I still think that, for a general survey of the life of the Lord, for the purpose of seeing part as related to part, Mark would be better. But you have led the conversation into the most vital and spiritual truths of Christianity."

He had found the verses, and he read: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . . If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

I said: "Here is spiritual freedom because a man is free from his old self. His life is started from a new moral principle; the soul taking fast hold of new facts and living by them. Those facts center in a personal Christ to whom this faith virtually joins us. One comes thus into the realm of trust, confidence, faith. It is equally a state of mind and a mood of heart. The newly given principle is vitally trustful in Jesus Christ as Teacher and Master and Saviour. And now one more reading. It is found in the First Epistle of John, the fifth chapter, the eleventh and twelfth verses."

He found it and read: "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

The words had an extraordinary effect upon him. He looked them over very closely, as if they were new. Then he laid the Bible open at the words, on his lap, and a singular wistful look came into his face. I did not speak. In a few moments he took up his Bible and read aloud

the words again. "That is so," he said, very emphatically. "Salvation is an inward life, and the life should be communicated from another life, and the one who gives it should be some one such as the 'Son' in this verse, and the man who has it can be spoken of as one who 'hath life.' I wish I felt certain who he really is."

I remarked that, had we examined the miracles, especially that of the resurrection of Christ, as we had intended at this interview, he would be more certain as to who Christ is. I reminded him that he had wished to take the subject now before us. But it might be true that the Holy Spirit, the existence of whom he had once said his Quaker blood inclined him to acknowledge, had guided us in the diversion by which we had discussed these vital themes to-day.

He said that there was another question on his list, viz., the "forgiveness of sins." He recalled to my attention my former claim that this was a distinctively Christian doctrine. He asked how the alleged atonement of Christ procured sin's remission? I frankly told him that I did not know. I only saw this, that God had, as shown by the atonement, considered the question of satisfaction, of substitution, of what was a sufficient propitiation, of what would justify him in granting absolution. The suffering of one who himself deserved not to suffer, showed that God had considered the whole thing, and was satisfied on that account to forgive men on certain necessary conditions. Jesus did not himself use the word "atonement." He left that word to be used by one of those apostles whom he promised to "guide into all truth." It is the same with the word "justification," employed by Paul in formula-

ting the Christian belief, under the guidance of the promised Holy Spirit of God. I said, "I want you to read certain utterances of Christ—free utterances, given not in studied systematic form,—for he spake among plain men, declaring truth in the germ, which was afterward to be put into doctrinal phrase. Will you be good enough to read once more, this time from your Triglot, the fourteenth and fifteenth verses of the third chapter of John's Gospel?"

He read: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." I called his attention to the word "*must*," in his Greek—*i. e.*, δεῖ; and that it has the force of a *necessity*, here of a *moral* necessity. Because there was a need of the "lifting up" before another thing could be done, Christ was to die. The "lifting up" of the serpent was done years before in the wilderness. And every Jew, to whom Christ's words should come, understood what was meant. The truth was couched in language drawn from historic rather than philosophic sources. The "lifting up" could only refer to Christ's death on the cross. And this lifting up was necessary morally. The other Greek word has the telic sense. "Must be lifted up" (*ἵνα*, that)—*i. e.*, in order that—so that this end might be secured. Here is an atonement taught in other than formal and dogmatic language,—but unmistakably taught. Satisfaction, substitution, transference of blessing, are all set forth in simple unprofessional words—words descriptive rather than definitive. Christ's dying is here put as the "precedent conditional" of hu-

man salvation. "Please read also Mark, tenth chapter and forty-fifth verse."

He read: "The Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many." "The word ransom, *λύτρον*, you will remember, can mean nothing else than 'ransom-money'—money paid too, by one to purchase another's deliverance. Its equivalent in the Old Testament is 'satisfaction.' 'Ye shall take no satisfaction, *λύτρον*, for the life of a murderer,' as we read in Numbers. In a popular translation of Æschylus it is given: 'What *atonement*, *λύτρον*, is there for blood?' Chryseis brings rich presents for the 'ransom' or 'redemption' of his daughter from the Greeks. In this same line of thought Jesus spoke in another verse, close to those you have read from the third chapter of John. Will you be so kind as to read the seventeenth verse?"

He read: "God sent his Son into the world that the world through him might be saved." "This verse," I said, "read in connection with the 'lifting up' and the 'ransom' and the 'giving of his life,' shows that salvation was vitally dependent upon the dying of Jesus Christ for others. And Peter's comment, after describing the death and resurrection of Jesus, is: 'God hath exalted him to give the forgiveness of sins;' and again, 'by this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins.' And Jesus himself said to a penitent, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.' I may not be able to see *how* the holy suffering of the holy Sufferer suffices; *how* God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth. But I can see that he has considered the matter. And if Christ's atonement satisfies him, so that he can righteously forgive



sinners, that fact ought to satisfy you and me. I do assure you that millions of the human race have so taken it, and say with Paul, 'We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.'"

He said: "I have one other point on which I want your assistance. I want to find what Jesus Christ said about the other world, and where to find the verses in which he speaks of it. It is immensely important to know all one can know about the future life."

I told him that Jesus in his teaching was very definite. There was always the grand background of his second coming, the resurrection, the final judgment, and the two eternal states. That these ideas came out everywhere, in the most informal way, and often in the most casual conversation of Jesus. For instance, Christ spoke of heaven as a "Paradise." It is the Oriental word for a pleasure garden. It is described in the Bible as a place where "joy and gladness are found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody." Under this figure he sets forth the happy state of holy souls. He called it such to a poor prisoner at his side when he was dying. He described heaven, also, as a many-roomed mansion. "Will you read what he said in John's Gospel, the fourteenth chapter, at the first verse?"

He read: "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come again and receive you unto myself."

"The distinct personality of men after death is what he teaches, and also the companionship of sympathetic souls with himself. So, too, elsewhere, he taught some who would have held that we do not continue to exist



after we die, that 'God was not the God of the (non-existent) dead, but of the living' (dead). What Jesus taught about the resurrection of the body can better be considered when we take up the matter of his own resurrection. But it is enough now to say that the promise to those who would do certain things—'I will raise him up at the last day'—is repeated three times in one chapter of John's Gospel; showing how the thought of a resurrection was the familiar background of his daily teaching. So, too, Jesus put a day of final judgment after this resurrection day, for all the race. Please read what he says in John, fifth chapter, at the twenty-ninth verse."

He read: "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." Mr. B—— said: "This is too literal! Can we not understand him to speak in a figurative way of some great national event?"

I replied: "You wanted to hear what Christ said. He was certainly speaking of literal things. I let you read his own literal words. He made familiar, I had almost said, daily reference to this judgment day. He spoke of it as 'that day.' 'Take heed lest that day come upon you unawares.' 'Of that day knoweth no man.' 'It will be more tolerable for Sodom in that day.' Beyond 'that day,' will come the chief rewards of the righteous man, as he stands a perfected being, complete alike in body and soul. We read: 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their

Father.' Christ identifies himself forever with his followers. Will you read what he says in John, seventeenth chapter, the twenty-fourth verse?"

He read: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me."

"Read also the twenty-third verse."

"I in them and thou in me."

"Let me read a few more verses, for you are weary." I read from my own pocket Testament: "For the Father loveth you because ye believed that I came forth from God." "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven; whosoever denieth me before men, him will I also deny before the angels of God."

"But," I said, "I want you to read for yourself, one more declaration of Jesus Christ. It is in John, the sixth chapter, and at the forty-seventh verse. I want you to emphasize the word '*hath*' in it, and read it as if addressed to yourself." He read: "He that believeth on me *hath* everlasting life."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### PROVIDENCE AND FAITH.

ON Mr. B——'s table, at our next meeting were two books, his Bible and a copy of Browning. The latter was open at the poem "Cleon." As I took it up, I noticed that he had marked the famous passage in which Cleon, in response to the inquiry of the king, recites the list of his own achievements as poet and painter and artist, over against those of the king's kingcraft. He says that his art was less his own than the result of long ages of poetic and artistic development. Introducing the fine figure of the hollow sphere scantily filled with water, which touches first one part and then another of the inner surface as the globe is turned, while the air within touches always every part of it, Browning makes Cleon say :

"The vulgar call first full  
Up to the visible night—and after void :  
Not knowing air's more hidden properties :  
And thus our souls, misknown, cried out to Zeus  
To vindicate his purpose in our life.  
Why stay we on the earth unless to grow ?  
Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,  
That he or other god, descended here,  
And, once for all, showed, simultaneously,  
What in our nature never can be shown  
Piecemeal or in succession ; showed, I say,  
The worth, both absolute and relative,  
Of all his children from the birth of time,  
*His instruments for his own appointed work.*"

This last line he had underscored. He said: "Last night I did not sleep much, and during the long hours this line kept going over and over in my mind:

'His instruments for his own appointed work.'

"Strangely, too, my knowledge, gained in boyhood, of the old biblical men, came back to me in connection with Browning's line. I seemed to see as never before, that there was a reason for their living. They were 'his instruments in his appointed work.' This was a new setting for me to give to their lives. They had parts assigned to them in God's great plan. It made a very different thing of their lives to me. I have had not a little sport over some of these stories. I used to say that these men were put on the biblical page for our imitation, and then I denounced the Bible as immoral. But I can see, now, that the reason for according them place in the history is not that they are primarily for either our imitation or our warning, but that it may be shown how they were, sometimes unconsciously, working as God's instruments, in unfolding his great plan. They are not held up so much as examples of virtue, as of men who served their part in the programme. There was that great, overgrown Samson, a man freakish and absurd enough, no doubt. But I can see how in a rude age, such a man might be of use in hand to hand contests with the enemies of his country, and so that his life would work into the wide plan. And he quoted again the lines:

—— " 'The worth  
Of all his children from the birth of time,  
His instruments for his own appointed work.' "

I remarked, as he paused for a moment, that I did not see how he could stop at the point of including men in the system of divine restoration; that even those of our naturalists who call themselves agnostics, have admitted that there is "a moral order in the things of the universe." "Are you," I said, "not obliged to go on and include in the plan a good many historical events, which, all alone, would be very objectionable? If you take in the grotesque Samson, can you leave out the wars in which he was engaged; can you leave out the destruction of the old Canaanites, who of right had not a single foot of land in Palestine—the men of whom you spoke in one of our earlier conversations? If you own a moral plan of rescue, intervention and salvation running through human history, I do not see how you can stop with acknowledging that good men have a place. You must logically own that bad men, and also that evil influences, are also possible to the programme; nay, that they must be used by God in his all-comprehending plan. There must be place for the laws of nature; also, for the laws of human and of divine personality. This divine personality will work sometimes on the very edge of the miraculous; and if it shall pass the line, it will not need any infraction of the laws of nature to accomplish the actually miraculous. That he usually employs fixed laws, is not by any necessity for him, but because that mode of action has better moral uses for us. And so wars in the natural course of human history are events provided for, God overruling them; and occasionally, when interventions of miracles are necessary to the plan, the miracle will come, as well as the war."

He said: "But the Hebrew wars, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, including frightful massacres, were expressly ordered of God."

"You admit that God can order events, but would hesitate to admit that God can order events through men. Besides, you must not forget the peculiarity of the biblical history. It is religious history. It is the religious side of historical events that is depicted. The writers are tracing a divine intervention in its progress unto the great intervention. Its point of view is God and his ruling and overruling. All things are seen as through the lens of the Divine Eye. Once get this point of view, and many a form of expression in the narrative is explained. Hallam writes his history from the point of view of the English Constitution. Macaulay writes from the point of striking biographies. Greene sees all things as related, not to the crown, but to the common people of England. Moses wrote from the point of view that sees a moral design in all things and all events. A mere naturalist, writing of the facts recorded in the first chapter of Genesis, would have given us the scientific outlook upon the creative process. Moses writes: 'In the beginning, God.' And he never drops from that key for a moment, whether he depicts nature, the doings of individual men, or the development of the world's history. Results, which an ordinary historian would refer to secondary causes, and correctly, are here referred to God's hand, or God's will, or God's word. They are seen as if they originated with God—not indeed in any such way as to make the moral acts of men free from praise or blame; but the end is seen when speaking of the origin. A potent influence in

the mind of a great moral leader is written down as a direct command of God, and the formula is 'and God said.' It is the air and the tone of the narration, colored by the idea that all things are tending toward the advent of the Messiah. God has adopted human history—especially the history of the people foremost in moral ideas—as his way of developing his plan of restoration and salvation. He has taken a series of men, a series of facts; and, so, if he will have himself understood as doing it, this constant idea must appear in the record which he directs and inspires. A narrative written from this point of view, and correctly written, would seem to be as necessary as is the ordering of the events themselves. Given, the facts with such a tendency, there is also required a Bible in which this tendency is everywhere evident. It would not do to trust the record of these events to any chance historian who did not see the trend and the determinative end. If it were worth while to have such a progressive intervention, it were worth while to have the story of it accurately given. The facts warrant the Book."

He asked to what events I referred? I replied: "Take such an event as the attempted sacrifice of Isaac, by Abraham."

He interrupted me to say: "You have named the hardest thing in the Bible for me to believe."

"Any harder than that other sacrifice, in which another Father also gave his only begotten Son?"

"But why do you put those two together?"

"Simply because it is impossible to understand the former aside from the latter fact. It is the moral purpose of both that justifies either of them. The charge of



unnaturalness is equally strong, or, as I would prefer to put it, equally weak, for each of the instances. The final ends of a father are more than the exercise of parental feeling. Indeed, in the human relation, the fatherly feeling has to be made subordinate to the moral good of the child, and even sometimes to the moral welfare of others outside the household. In the case of Isaac and of Jesus Christ, there is One who can decide whether moral ends existed of such a kind as to subordinate to such an extent the natural parental feeling. There might be a case in which God should see the ends when we could not see them. What if God saw that somewhere between the Flood and the Advent there was need of a peculiar moral demonstration of the thought that was always present in his own mind? What if the idea of sacrifice was growing dim? What if, as introductory to the Mosaic institutions with their various offerings, each preceded by a slain lamb, there was needed a most remarkable setting forth of the worth, the position, and the meaning of sacrifice as connected with salvation? What if, by some human father who had an only son whom he would give up in sacrifice, there was need of showing to the ages what God's love in self-sacrifice was like—as far as it could be done without the actual deed of slaying his human son? The human son must be saved, for he represents both method and result. In the case of Isaac the knife must be stayed, while in the true atonement the victim must follow the path of sacrifice to the end. What was slain on that occasion, as God intended it to be, was the lamb caught in the thicket near by—the first of a series of lambs that were to bleed

on Hebrew altars; thus showing forth the coming 'Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.' What was saved on that occasion was Isaac, whose salvation typified ours. As with this incident so with many others, such as that of Jonah, whose three days' burial in the sea monster, and whose new life on the earth were the setting forth of the resurrection fact in our Lord's career. In like manner the healing by the brazen serpent gets its justification from its intended moral meaning."

He asked: "Are you sure that you are not reading into these narratives a meaning not really there?"

"But these narratives must have had some moral purpose; and if not this, then none other has ever been discovered. Have you any other interpretation to suggest?"

He confessed that he had none to offer.

I said: "You must also notice that our Lord sees this moral purpose in these events. He cites the story of Jonah's release after three days, when he is prophesying his own death and resurrection. The incident of raising the brazen serpent is directly adduced by Jesus, as showing his own uplifting on the cross. He said: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.' And he seems to have connected this event in the wilderness with the unaccomplished sacrifice of Isaac and Abraham. Isaac is called the 'only son' of Abraham. In Isaac inhered the 'promises.' Isaac did 'not perish,' but had a greatly prolonged 'life.' And so it is that these facts give color and tone, and even supply the words in the various phrases of that great utterance of our Lord: 'For God so loved the world, that *he* gave his only begotten Son,

that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life !' ”

There was on his face the far-away look. He was thinking profoundly ; and for a few minutes I did not disturb the current of his thoughts. At length he turned to me, as if he would have me go on.

I said, very quietly and solemnly : “ In this looking back over history, with this clue, you are exercising an act of faith.”

He started and said : “ What do you mean ? ”

“ Just this ; that in seeing the remarkable unity of moral purpose in all the biblical events and in this record of them, you are using an instinctive faith, the capacity for which is in every human soul—the faith that sees the new relations to the Father, and so trusts him in his way of restoration for man. You are taking hold of God’s plan of intervention and salvation. You are beginning to trust him in the revelation of his great moral purpose that culminates in Christ.”

He said, very solemnly : “ If so, I am afraid it is a poor faith. Is there not somewhere in your Bible something about a man who said, ‘ Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief ’ ? ”

I replied by asking : “ Is the Bible any more my Bible than it is *your* Bible ? Can you any more get along without this moral key to human history than I can ? ”

He answered by a quiet “ No.”

I said : “ Then let us see, in this your Bible, God’s incentive to our natural faculty of faith.”

He asked whether our faith did not depend entirely on the convictions of our reason. I asked him if a child’s

faith in its father and its mother depended on its reasoning powers whereby it deduced the fact that father and mother were trustworthy. The truth is that the faith comes first, and comes naturally. There is a native capacity for it; and only years afterward does it justify itself to the reason. So that the most reasonable thing under certain circumstances is faith. It is reasonable that there should be a natural instinct of truth in the child for the parent. It is exercised before there can be any reasoning about it. Whatever we men may be morally toward God now since we are sinners, in the original making of our natures there was capacity and potentiality, and so the possibility of our being actually, "the sons of God." The deepest thing in us, the ultimate fact about us is, then, not the capacity to reason, but the instinct of trust. It is anterior to reason, back behind reason farther in toward the core of our nature—this capacity for faith in God. It is the one ultimate moral fact in the final analysis of our nature. Given a God, who is by his nature a moral being, and given also a man who is by nature a moral being, the one of them a father, the other of them a son, and the final innermost relation of the two must be moral; and the deeper moral action of a man's nature must be one of moral will, and choice, and trust—*i. e.*, an act of faith."

I continued: "You have been gaining the material of faith, on which it can act with larger intelligence, in these conversations. But, when in your sleepless hours last night, you put these things together, and looked along the course of the old-time history, and took in the fact that it was all one plan leading on to Jesus Christ,

the great intervention, it was a look of faith. You felt that you could trust God with those old events. They drew out the slumbering capacity for faith. You took hold of them and of God in them, in a new way."

He nodded his head in assent. I continued: "It remains now for you to give to God your own personal trust as he presents his Son as your Saviour. It is an act of soul toward him that you must do by and for yourself. It is as distinct and conscious an act of soul as would have been your act of body had you lived on earth when he did, and had he then and there bidden you rise and follow him."

"I think I know what you mean," he said.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE NEW TESTAMENT MIRACLES.

MR. B—— was ready for me when we next met. At the close of the last conversation, I had asked him, just as I was leaving, to join with me in the prayer. He shook his head. But at the final moment, as I pressed his hand, I told him that he owed it to himself to pray to God ; that he had not one doubt about the existence of a personal God who could hear prayer ; that he had asked me to help him, and I had responded ; and it was only a reasonable thing also to ask God to help him to see these things more clearly ; that since Jesus Christ knew more about these matters than we, because, as all moral thinkers are disposed to admit, he was prominent as a religious teacher, we should consult him ; that since he (Mr. B——) had sought the aid of Jesus Christ by consulting his teachings in the New Testament, the one more obvious privilege should be used, viz., prayer ; that we had advanced far enough in our discussion to warrant us in asking for forgiveness for Christ's sake. That, for an answer, it would be reasonable to look to what Christ had said about the forgiveness of sins ; that we were to expect that, if sin could in any way be forgiven, God would tell us so, and tell us by an authoritative teacher ; that this Teacher sent from God had told us to ask "in his name."

He responded by saying: "But you forget that the

question with me is about how much credit I can give to what Christ says on that and on other subjects. It is to me a question of crediting *him* first, and then of believing his utterances ; a question of any such hearty believing him as to warrant me in seeking and taking his aid. I want light on who he really is before I can think of such a thing as going to God through him."

I reminded him of the words of Jesus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." I begged him to pray when I had gone. But he made no promise. I reminded him that his praying would be a test of his moral earnestness in these matters. He did not respond by a single word.

I began the interview, of which this chapter is the record, by asking directly the question whether, as a man sincerely wanting to know the truth, he had prayed to God since I saw him last. He said, after a little hesitation: "I don't know how to pray. I did try, but I could only think of one thing that I could honestly say. I said to God: 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'" My friend burst into tears, and could not go on for a little time. I waited for his agitation to subside, telling him meantime that God does not turn aside from the sincere prayer of a man for the forgiveness of sins. I ventured the suggestion that his rapid reading of the Gospel of Mark would help his dawning faith. He assured me that he had read that Gospel through, and that it had helped him in one way, but in another had suggested great difficulties. On asking what they were, he named the miracles, adding: "I know they ought not to trouble me. I understand well that a supernatural Christ is the need,



and that a supernatural Christ should be supernaturally born, and that he should do supernatural works. I admit it all *in general*. But when I sit down before any one of the miracles, and study it in detail, I find myself saying, 'Can it be credited,' and a host of objections rise up out of the graves where I had buried them. I know they are ghosts; but they haunt and worry me."

"That fact does not in the least surprise me. Indeed, in thinking about the theme for to-day, I had so far anticipated some such feeling on your part, that I want to put over the subject of Christ's resurrection again. Let us come directly to the question of the New Testament miracles."

His face lighted up in an instant. "Nothing," he said, "could give me greater pleasure. I want to take the side of the opposer, and you that of the defender."

I replied that it was dangerous for us to argue against our convictions. It disturbed the delicate sense of truthfulness and honesty for one to do even momentary violence to his sense of right, though it was only to draw out another's views. That if there were a believing mood, in which he was more and more coming into sympathy with Christ, he must guard against injuring the tender germ, lest there should be no complete development; that it would be better to put it in this way, viz., for him to state the objections, and then for us both to try and meet them; since he and I had a common interest in having it true, if it were really so, and that Jesus Christ was worthy of being trusted.

I selected the miracle of feeding the five thousand. He was to take his Triglot and read Matthew's version

of the story, keeping his English Bible open at Mark's version, while I should read Luke aloud, and name any variations or additions in John's narrative. We spent a few moment in noticing the facts omitted by one or inserted by another, until the story was fully before us. He said: "There are no serious differences in the four accounts. But there ought not to be the least difference, even in a single word, if the four men were divinely inspired to record it."

"That would amount," I said, "to having one Gospel signed by the four men. What would the sceptics say to that? They would urge that it was one man's work in the invention of the story, and that he had produced in some way the signatures of the other three. Or, if four separate documents existed, it would be said that three men had copied from one. But four writers independent, yet drawing from a common source, seeing the events through their own personality, and each having a slightly different end in view, and each writing possibly for a different class of men, and, in one case, for a different nationality, and each perfectly independent and utterly careless of any contradiction of the other's story—that is what we have in these Gospels. Their trustworthiness is immensely increased thereby. And as to their divine inspiration, it must be remembered that it is the divine inspiration of human faculties that is claimed for them; an inspiration that allows and employs their individuality, and their honesty and their testimony as eye and ear witnesses. Their divine inspiration no more changes their style of writing, or their special purpose in grouping the facts, than it does the features of their faces.

We have two inspirations: one of human genius, and the other of God's Spirit; and they mingle freely. So that we can speak of an authentic document as we do of other documents submitted to our inspection; and can also speak of a narrative as free from error, because the writers were divinely guided. But, strictly speaking, the question of the inspiration of these writers need not now, at this point, be considered. Afterward, when we are through with the examination of the story, we may find that its inspiration is a fair inference. Now we are considering the four Gospels as so much human testimony, and asking about the credibility of a certain story in them."

"Suppose," I continued, "you name any objections that occur to you."

He replied: "I have heard it said that this miracle was totally unnecessary. All Jesus had to do was to dismiss the crowd, and let them go to the cities and towns a few miles distant and get food."

"Yes, that might have been done, and something vastly worthy might have been sacrificed. Here are men hearing the 'gospel of his kingdom.' They may have come to the point of accepting discipleship. A few hours more may make a great difference in their spiritual position. Their eternal salvation may depend on staying with him, at that time, long enough to decide the great moral question of their whole existence. In such a case the miracle, with reference to that group, may be considered by the Lord as altogether necessary. He is the ultimate judge of the necessity in the case. Then, too, the people are to tell the story of the miracle to the world. It would

make this teacher seem near to men—concerned about their bodily as well as their spiritual wants. In all ages the story would have helpfulness to men, as showing Christ's care for the common things that touch the body, while the great lesson would be the ability of such a Christ to feed men's souls with the bread of eternal life. It is impossible to over-estimate the moral worth of such a miracle through the Christian centuries."

He suggested, also, the objection that the miracle had been considered by some as unworthy of so exalted a personage as Jesus Christ claimed to be; and I called his attention to the fact that this homely miracle, and others like it, had made the human Christ seem nearer to men than those grander ones wrought on great occasions.

He raised, also, the question: "Can we not understand this event as substantially historical, and yet find no real miracle in it? Paulus, or was it Renan, one or both, suggests that the crowd had brought with them their lunch; that Jesus selected the boy who had the loaves and the few small fishes as a type of the lunch with which each group was probably provided, and that the blessing asked on the boy's lunch was asked really upon all the stores of food in the party; that instead of the loaves multiplied by miracle, they were quickly, as if miraculously, produced, when the people were seated on the grass; that everything was natural and nothing was miraculous, save in appearance."

I said: "On this theory, somebody is guilty of deception. Jesus, or his disciples who distributed the bread, or these four men who give us the record, are one and all untruthful. I do not see how we can clear any of them;

for they are all either actors or participators in a kind of fraud. Not they only, for the story was instantly told, and these 'five thousand men, besides women and children,' knew whether the thing was miraculous or merely natural; whether it was only sitting down to the lunch they had carried, or was an actual multiplication of the boy's loaves and fishes. If it was only a natural and non-miraculous affair, they would have said so by the hundred, and crushed in this way this new religion. Several hundred accomplices, or at least abettors in the fraud, are involved in the case. Among the throng must have been sharp-eyed enemies. They would know about the fact of Jesus pretending, or appearing to pretend, to feed the people, when they only fed themselves. It was no private gathering. There was every chance for detection, were there the least acting at the time or the least overstatement afterward. Jesus did or did not rise and bless the loaves and fishes, and tell the disciples to feed the people with them. To own the event historic at all is to own it miraculous; for too many hundreds were involved for the least collusion, or invention, or mistake, or subsequent addition. Jesus, standing there, knew the actual facts. It is impossible to acquit him of connivance with a fraud that destroys utterly his character, if the Renan theory is true. When we consider all that is involved in treating the incident as an actual one, and yet not miraculous, it is vastly easier of the two to accept the miracle just as it stands. Not one word of disproof, when hundreds could have said that they were there, and nothing miraculous occurred; not one solitary word of denial or protest was raised when the story was

told. Nor, when, afterward, the written gospel appeared, was there any charge that the miracle did not occur, or had not been told before in the "oral gospel." It was a case where contradiction was easy, if possible. It was told among men who were sceptical about miracles in general, who were especially sceptical about any that a man in the social position of Jesus might do, and who were more than especially sceptical as to a homely miracle like this of the feeding of the thousands. It got itself believed, for the people on the strength of this miracle wanted to make him a king; so says the narrative, and the thousands there knew whether that was proposed by acclamation or not, since the story of the popular intention was associated with the miracle. For here, as elsewhere, the writers of the Gospels put in these references to popular movements, which show how conscious they were of their own straightforwardness, supplying, as they frequently do, names and dates, and times, and familiar circumstances, as no writers would ever dare do who were foisting an imposture on mankind."

He said there was one other theory. He smiled as he named it. It was "that no such fact ever occurred, but that Jesus talked about himself in figurative language as the 'bread of life,' and that some of his enthusiastic friends changed his figurative words into historical language to exalt their Lord."

I replied that I did not wonder that he could hardly retain a sober face when speaking of such an interpretation. He would not claim such a theory for his own. I was sure. He rejoined that some man calling himself a minister of religion had seriously proposed it; but I



begged him not to think any better of it on that account. "It was the theory of desperation. It met a supposed difficulty by creating a dozen others, each one of which was more difficult to believe than the miracle itself. It did not say when or by whom the alteration was made. If done, it must have been accomplished at once, while the disciples were repeating the "oral gospel." The story of Christ's resurrection was told within two months all over Jerusalem. This would bring up the miracles of his life. The whole career of Jesus would be rehearsed. This, as a chief miracle with thousands of witnesses, is told. There is not time nor place nor conspiracy of circumstances to allow a myth. The story-tellers of the 'good news' were, some of them, alleged participators in the miracle, and knew whether these things were so, or whether Jesus had only used a figure of speech in his teaching. They knew whether there had occurred any alteration from figure to alleged fact within the three months after his death. Subsequently to those three months, change without detection in a matter of such vast notoriety was impossible. It is needless to point out the fact that this theory of figurative language does violence to every sentence of the four records. On another day and on a different occasion Jesus called himself the 'bread of life.' And no descriptions can be farther apart than that which records the miracle and that which records the discourse in which he uses the figure. The effort to make the miracle a mere figure of speech, is not to interpret but to ignore the documents. The people who were partakers of the miraculous bread attempted to make Jesus a king. They knew whether the thing was 'all



talk ' or not, whether the facts were correctly told at first, and afterward correctly written out. The whole sum of the circumstances shows something *done* rather than merely *said*."

Mr. B—— wished to propose one more theory of the miracle—not because it was his own, but because he had heard the theory applied to other, and especially to Old Testament events. He said: "Why may we not drop the inquiry whether any of those events are *literally* true? We can get the moral impression of these things just the same even if they are all fables and myths. So that the moral influence on us is just as good whether Jesus did or did not do the miracle. We can still talk of him as the 'giver of the bread of life'—meaning thereby that his alleged teachings help us spiritually."

I said: "Yes, we can still talk, in that Pickwickian sense, of these sacred things—and talk it will be; and we shall know ourselves guilty of a pious fraud, and others will know it as well. The result, in the end, will be the of loss all honest conviction, not only on religion but on any other subject. We shall despise ourselves soon, as those who are playing tricks with language. We shall damage our own moral earnestness, and court for ourselves an intellectual infidelity on all questions of fact."

He said: "I have had enough of that floundering about in intellectual infidelity, until I had hardly anything, on any subject, in heaven or earth, that I heartily believed. I know it is a terrible mood of mine—the mood of universal doubt about facts. The mind loses all its grip. Its power to take hold and to keep hold is gone. Have you read," he asked, almost vehemently,

“‘Amiel’s Journal?’ It is the saddest book in modern literature. A keen and cultured critic has worked only by doubt on all subjects in art, in literature, and in religion, and the result is a mind utterly unnerved. The man at length doubts if he doubts. He is intellectually destroyed by just such processes of criticism as some would apply to these New Testament miracles. I know too well the danger to a man’s brain—to say nothing about his moral honesty—of handling any subject in that way. I am just getting my feet on something substantial. I am in an agony for facts rather than fancies. I do not want any poetizing, but something actual and historic. This talk about it all being the same whether these miracles were or were not done; whether these things are true or false,—*it is not so!* The ‘moral impression’ is not the same. Besides, the moral impression is not the whole of what a man in my position wants. I want to know whether this Christ can be trusted as one who is a Saviour; and the greatness of the miracle has to me a great deal to do with the greatness of the miracle worker. I have used scraps of the biblical phraseology all my life to embellish a sentence, and to round off a period. I have quoted many a biblical incident as I would a Greek myth. But I am in no mood for that now. Are *these things facts?* That is my great concern to-day. The bearing of these facts, not so much on myself as on Christ’s own character as Teacher and Saviour, is my inquiry now. Every miracle bears on the question of him as one able to say, ‘Thy sins be forgiven thee.’ I want to know whether the world has a supernatural Christ as an actual fact. And I have no patience with this style of treating

the miracle, the feeding of the multitude, or any other. And, by the way," he continued, "you must have been led by a higher wisdom than your own to choose this subject to-day. For I was thinking before you came in that I could not recall any great miracle which Christ *himself* did. The incarnation was God's miracle, so was the resurrection—though we haven't considered that yet; but if the incarnation is granted, the resurrection would accompany it as a fit fact. I was thinking that Christ himself, in his own proper person, should do some one great miracle. And then you brought in this one of the miraculous feeding. It is a miracle, if he ever did one. And, as I said before, I cannot allow any one to say that the impression is the same whether it be fact or fancy."

He had spoken so long and so earnestly that he was a good deal exhausted, and I begged him to exert himself less, and let me finish the interview. He assented, but said he would like to know how I would meet the last theory he had named, not indeed as his own, but as one he wanted to oppose.

I remarked that he had disposed of the theory from the moral side. But I wanted to add that if this method of treating facts "as of no consequence," except to get poetry out of them, were to be adopted, I could not see where we were to stop.

Continuing, I said: "May we go through human history in that way? If so, what will be the result? Is every historic fact to be deemed credible and valuable exactly and only as it has a moral influence on us? Must we treat the great characters of history also in the same way? It will be no matter whether a given person

really lived or not, since his moral influence is just the same on this theory. All the later work of Niebuhr on Roman history, and all that critical work done centuries before Niebuhr on the Gospels in separating the true from the false, is in vain. Fancies are the equals of facts on this theory. We need not any more ask whether a given man ever lived. It would be all the same, on this theory, if Christ had never really lived and if God had never existed. The reign of phantasy has taken the place of the reign of fact.

“Now then, all this is without foundation. Truth is truth whether it hurts or helps. The existence of an eminent man who has done a great work in God’s plan of revealing himself, is a factor that cannot be dropped out of the account. Take it in modern history. It does make all difference whether Napoleon really lived ; for he altered the map of Europe. His moral influence, by way of example, is the smallest thing about his career. He did something. Grant’s moral influence, by way of example, is not very large. But he saved a nation. He was great for what he did. So in religious history, it does make all difference whether Paul did what is claimed for him, or was a merely imaginary character affecting the world by his supposed example. It does make all difference whether Christ is a fictitious being whose inventors put him into positions in which his conduct is our example, or whether he actually lived and wrought out our redemption through the deeds he did and the death he died. It does make a difference whether David and Solomon lived, reigned, established the Kingdom of Israel, and so did work preparatory to the advent of the Mes-

siah; whether Abraham was a fiction or his career a fact. These great souls of the olden time were men full of faith—*i. e.*, they were faithful workers in God's plan of providing rescue for the race through the coming Christ. These massed series of great facts have their divinely appointed place. They are parts of the one great historic religion. They are, of necessity, among the things contributory to Christ. The moral influence of the men through example, is the least of all they have done for us. They have put into the kingdom of God certain great facts. These facts have changed the whole moral history of the race. It was their work as factors in God's plan that chiefly blesses us. Their deeds made up the religion we inherit. Especially is it true of Jesus Christ that his *deeds* as Son of man and Son of God are essential not only as affecting us by example, but they are a part of the work wrought for us. They are all needed in the making of the 'eternal redemption for us,' through which we have the forgiveness of sins and the heavenly inheritance. Each miracle has its fit place. One teaches of Christ's dominion over nature as he stills the storm on the lake, another of his power over the grave as he raises Lazarus, and yet another shows his power over the world of evil as demons are cast out, while the transfiguration splendor shows that the dwellers in the world of the holy are so allegiant to him that at his call they leave the ministrations of heaven for the service of the Christ on earth. And not one of these events is a detached miracle; not one of them is a characterless freak of power. They are moral truth expressing itself in physical fact. They all bear on the culminating redemption. And this

miracle of the feeding has its place as a homely, practical miracle, meeting a transient physical and a perpetual moral want, and adding to the conviction of every careful student of it, that Jesus was the Christ, and can be trusted with the redemption of our souls."

I told him that I wanted to sum up the evidence for the miracle.

"Jesus calls it, the next day, a 'miracle.' The evangelist also calls it a 'miracle.' The people recognized it as a miracle, and on account of it sought to make him king. It appealed to their sight, their touch, their taste, and, in the words of it, to their hearing. There were five thousand men participants in it, 'besides women and children.' The four documents, universally appealed to by friends and foes of the new religion as authentic, all record it. Two of the writers were witnesses by eye and ear and touch and taste; three of them, if Mark's Gospel be considered as having Peter's authority. The incident is absolutely uncontradicted by a line of opposite testimony. But the new religion, including this miracle, succeeded in getting itself believed, in the most critical age the world ever saw, among the foremost thinkers who have left the deepest marks on the race. And with every rising and every setting sun, the number increases of those who call this Jesus their Lord, and who entrust to him all the most precious things of their deeper spiritual life."

He said: "I know what it means for me to say that I admit the miracle."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### LEARNING TO PRAY.

**M**R. B— was more feeble at our next interview than I had previously seen him. He was still sitting in his reclining chair at the usual place fronting his library window. But though so manifestly ill, he insisted that I should remain, if I could, for the usual hour's conversation.

I told him that I wanted at some time to give a full hour to the Old Testament prophecies of Christ ; to show how men were especially selected each being intended to represent some single great virtue, preparatory to the final gathering of all virtues into the final Christ ; to show him that there were prophetic deeds done by these men, and prophetic national events that fairly overflowed with richest moral meaning in connection with the one great and glorious appearance of the Messiah ; that there were prophetic rites loaded down with the weight of Christly prediction, and a divinely given service for the temple worship which had not only its daily lamb offered morning and evening, but its Passover and Day of Atonement—the whole mighty sum of these prophetic outlookings having one and one only fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Some of the most thoughtful students of the Bible, I said, have been willing to risk the whole of Christianity on the argument from prophecy.



Mr. B—— signified his desire to go over that argument at some other time. As he hesitated about naming a subject that was evidently on his mind, I took up my notes on “Christ’s Resurrection,” which were lying by me. He noticed the act and asked if I had the same object in view in presenting this theme, as in discussing the miraculous loaves and fishes, viz.: the proof of the trustworthiness of Christ?

I replied that this was in part the reason, but that the resurrection of Christ showed resurrection a possibility, and so that our resurrection was not an incredible thing; while the direct promise of this risen Christ that he would raise us up “at the last day,” made what was on other grounds a probability become to us a grand certainty; that Christianity sought salvation for the whole man; for his body as well as for his soul and spirit.

I called his attention to the honor God put upon Christ’s person by his resurrection, and to it also as God’s endorsement of the claims of Jesus to be the supernatural Son; that Christ’s ascension, which was his completed resurrection, was a kind of visible reception of him, and thus was not only the natural finale to his career, but was God’s own testimony to the world that he had all confidence in Jesus Christ, and that we should therefore believe in him.

He said that the subject was a great one, but much too difficult for him at that time. He had thus waved aside the two themes I wanted to enter upon. There were a few moments of embarrassed silence, when he suddenly burst out with—“Don’t you think a man is bound to act as far as he believes?”

I assented, of course, wondering what would follow.

He continued: "I have been trying to do so in this matter; but it is a desperate struggle. When I was a boy I saw in an old copy of 'Pilgrim's Progress' a frightful wood cut of Pilgrim in the valley fighting with a host of miserable, misshapen demons, with Apollyon at their head. That is just where I am when I try to do anything practical about this matter. A great brood of demon thoughts comes crowding on me. All the objections I have ever heard, or have had of my own come back. It seems as if an invisible hand let them loose on me. I try to fight them down one by one, but it is tedious work. I know they have no real force, but they haunt and worry me. Vainly I say that I can answer these objections in some good degree. They do not come because they are reasonable, and reason does not scatter them. I suppose it is the old habit of years asserting itself; the old mood so hospitable to objections and so inhospitable to religion. I am sure there is little or nothing in these suggestions, but they are persistent. I seem to have been thinking backward all my life on this subject, and it is hard to think in a straightforward way. They are, I am certain, the old echoes of my former self. There comes up my old theory of a non-personal God; the old questions about why God need have had a Son; the suggestion that there may be some mistake, and Jesus Christ be not real, or if real, the accounts of him not correct, and so he, as we know him in the Gospels, be not trustworthy; the temptation not to care, as I used not to care, for the most part, whether these things are true or false—and yet I know that I do care and I do want some such being to

trust as Jesus Christ is; the fear that there may be some mistake about the forgiveness of sins, and that we may be led to think he will forgive, when we have no adequate reason for the belief—all the devils of doubt come flocking about me with mocking lips and jeering tone. I summon the other side—the good angels of the Christian beliefs, and when they come—but they do not always come for the calling—I give them hearty welcome. For I am getting to see that the only way out is through some such opening as that of Christianity. I am coming to get a glimpse, perhaps I should say a glimmer. I see that there is light in that direction. But the thing is not clearing up for me as I had hoped it would. I am fighting my way through all these obstacles into a better position. I think you can hardly understand what all this conflict means for me; for you were never sceptically inclined. And this struggle comes on whenever I try to do anything practical.”

His phrase “do anything practical” a little puzzled me, and I inquired of him his meaning.

He said: “Why do you ask that? Of course I mean that these things trouble me when I try to pray. *That*, I take it, is the practical thing for me now to do. I ought to put this matter in actual and personal practice, in so far as I see it true and feel it right. It seems to me that the grandest thing a man can do is to pray intelligently and heartily and honestly to his God. It takes in everything of our belief. It gives up the wretched controversy. It is owning up, *practically*, to the truth. It is the prodigal coming home. I cannot imagine a greater act than for a man with his whole soul to pray. It is the highest

exercise of manhood, if one can only do it aright,—there is the difficulty—to do it aright. It means so much to a man in my position truly to pray. I think,” he said, after a moment’s pause, “that I am knocking at the right door, but it does not open as I could wish. If one could only know that God heard him, that would be the best thing in all the world.”

“For what, specifically, are you praying?”

“Sometimes for nothing at all, only that God would just hear me. It would take out the anguish of this loneliness if God would simply hear. Sometimes, too, the longing to know that one has the forgiveness of sins takes possession of my mind. It would be a great thing if one were assured that his sins were taken way.”

I ventured to ask, “What sins?”

He looked up with a good deal of surprise, and with some reproach in his tone, he answered: “You know very well that my whole religious position has been wrong; the whole tone of my feeling has been antagonistic to God and to Christ. My attitude toward the Christian religion has been inexcusable. I thought I had been thinking, when I had only been objecting. I welcomed everything against religion.”

Pointing to his open Bible on the table he continued: “I took all my ideas of this religion at second-hand, and from objectors at that. The least I could have done was to study the original document of the Christian religion, the Bible, for myself, so as to know who Jesus Christ really is. If I have wronged myself a good deal, I have wronged him more. It is worse than a blunder; it is a wrong. It is no use now to go into particulars. The

whole spirit of my life has been not what it should have been toward God and Jesus Christ, and the claims of religion. I have looked down with a kind of pity on Christians as from my height of intellectual superiority, and something of my feeling toward them I have had also toward their Christ. In such a case the greatest need is to get that matter righted by the forgiveness of sins. This is the thing for which a man should pray."

He continued: "I have been reading the Psalms. The writer, or, rather writers, of quite a large number of them, seem to pray a good deal, but they pray as if they did not get much from it. Some of them have very little sense of forgiveness as actually secured."

I said: "That is because, from their historic position, some of them did not foresee the Christian facts. Now and then they get a glimpse of the larger truth, and write, 'There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared.' But often those men did not see the phenomena which our Christianity unfolds—the way of forgiveness through Christ. They had other and approximate pleas. They urged God's greatness and their own littleness. 'I am a worm and no man.' 'For thine own name's sake.' 'Hear and answer, for I have trusted in the Lord.' 'For thine own mercy's sake.' These and similar pleas are used. For every man who prays must use a plea, must ask for a reason which he names, that God will hear him. He pleads sonship, or service, or appeals to pity, to offerings brought or to repentance exercised—to some plea or other, every time he prays, all of which points onward to the great reason for hearing

prayer—the atonement and intercession of Jesus Christ so fully brought out in the New Testament.”

He said something about the Divine Fatherhood, but added instantly that all our nineteenth century thought emphasized law, and that both science and philosophy must emphasize the idea of a God—if it owned a God—who was a law-maker and a law-worker: that prayer to God might perhaps be an act of a child toward a father when the childhood relation was once established. The two ideas seemed to him antagonistic.

I replied that the Christian system maintained both conceptions, and then harmonized them, and therein showed the breadth of God's truth over against our human narrowness. It was clear that a million facts, which any man could see for himself, called for the recognition of some other relation in God than mere fatherhood. No father—if there were not some other relation than fatherhood—would do any one of the ten thousand things for his children that God does for men.

He interrupted me to say that to press the fatherhood idea alone would do more to make mere infidels than anything else. “I used myself to say that this idea of God was absurd in itself, and exactly contradictory to the facts in the case, as every thinking man might see for himself. God cares for something else than making men happy, judging from the world about us.”

“But,” I said, “you must not forget that ‘God is love.’”

“How will you prove that?” he said, somewhat sharply. “Who can strike the balance between the sad and the glad, and so mathematically demonstrate it?

Besides, reasoning from that one premise that God is love, there ought not to be a sad fact in his universe."

"I do not strike any balance sheet. No man could do that. But I have one fact, viz., God's gift of his only begotten Son to die for us, that we might have eternal life. That true, if all the sad facts were a thousand-fold more sad, still it must be that, in some way, he is love after all. It is love saving men from the penalty of moral law. It is God proving himself loving by an unparalleled self-denial in the surrender of Jesus Christ. This Christian system recognizes law, and emphasizes sovereignty in God. It does not set God as the God of love on one side, and God as the God of sovereign law on the other; but in Jesus Christ it harmonizes both, so that God can be a just God and the Saviour of men. Thinking alone of the claim that God is love, I do not see how a man could pray. For his whole mind and soul would rise up in rebellion against a God who made such a claim in such a world. Thinking alone of God as a holy sovereign whose law we have broken by our sin, we could not pray for him to be unjust enough arbitrarily to remit just penalty. The twofold harmonious conception of Christianity invites us as sinners to pray that, for Christ's sake, we may be forgiven. And what our reason declares, God's Spirit also teaches us, as he persuades men to pray."

He remarked, after a moment of thought, that none of our interviews had helped him more than the one in which I had pointed out for his reading the exact words used by Jesus Christ on the subjects of forgiveness and of the future life; and he asked me if I would find for



him, in his Bible, the chief verses that had a bearing on prayer."

I turned to Paul's letter to the Romans, the eighth chapter and the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh verses. He said: "These are Paul's words, rather than those of Christ."

"Then you give more credit to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John than to Paul?"

"With reference to them I own some sort of an inspiration. They have to report the sayings and doings of a supernatural person, and I can see how there ought to be enough of divine guidance to make their narration exact and reliable."

"Exactly so. You have given a good definition of inspiration. But if the narrators needed superintendence from above to keep them from error in what would be appealed to as authoritative documents, do you not virtually admit the need of divine inspiration for some others whose documents just as much need it? Take the case of the prophets who foretold Christ, and who would need not only a different kind but a higher degree of inspiration. Take the case of Paul, a man on whom devolved the logical statement of the dogma or doctrine he had received from Christ. Such men need especial guidance. Paul was a reasoner, as Luke was a narrator; each, in his own way, was to be an authority in the writings to which friends and foes would alike appeal. Then, too, on this question of prayer, Paul is peculiarly to be consulted, for he was himself a man of prayer."

He said: "I can understand that inspiration is needed for the records of Christian fact. But Paul is the author of dogma."

“Are you not wrong there? Paul is a reasoner rather than a dogmatist. He reasons on the facts and the teachings—*i. e.*, dogmas of Jesus Christ. We want Christ’s words or dogmas given accurately. And we want the natural and logical inferences therefrom stated carefully for the thinkers of all ages to consult. Jesus promised his apostles the inspiring Spirit, who should lead them, as apostles, into all truth. If he spake truthfully, some of them must have received this inspiration. Who were they, if not these men who wrote these Epistles, and why are their writings so inspired, if these are not?”

He waited a few moments, then took up his Bible, open at the chapter and verse I had indicated, and read very slowly, aloud, the words: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. . . . And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” I called his attention to the idea of the circularity of prayer, as described in this verse. Prayer starts in God, and, first sweeping downward in its gracious curve, it afterward mounts up again to its heavenly source, completing thus the circle at the point whence it started. He read the verses again with a kind of surprised look on his face. And, finally, he said: “This one verse answers completely all the objections to prayer that I ever heard raised. The substance of them all is the absurdity of a little prayer lifted here in a corner of the universe affecting the perfect plans of the great God. But if the true prayer starts always with God, then all

the force is gone from the objection. Oh, if one knew," he continued, "that the Spirit was moving him to pray, and was praying, as it were, through him?"

"And why have we not a right to believe that when we would heartily pray, he is with us, moving the prayer? Surely you cannot be more anxious to offer a true prayer than he to have you. He is the inspirer as well as hearer of prayer. Could he be unaware of the struggle you say you have had in trying to pray? Is he not, as you recognize him, ready to carry you through your host of difficulties and objections to the place of audience with God? Believe in the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of prayer, when you go to pray."

He said: "I do believe that, in a certain intellectual way. I want to take hold of it morally as well. A man's whole soul should yield itself to this Spirit."

I replied that he did not doubt his own sincerity in praying, nor yet his earnestness; that the act of the soul in yielding to God's Spirit was a very simple one; that he could rely, practically, on a friend's word as to pecuniary aid, and lay his plans in business accordingly; that he was to pray confidently, his doubts dispersed by the accepted promise of God's aid in prayer, since Jesus Christ had promised the Holy Spirit to those who seek this blessing. I urged him to take fast hold on this most helpful fact in his prayer.

He replied that this was a practical fact, and that he should be sure to use it. He marked the text with his pencil, as though he felt that he must read it again.

I found for him, next, the words of Christ in John's Gospel, the fourteenth chapter, and the sixth verse. He

read aloud : " I am the way, the truth, and the life ; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." I remarked that the words forbade other ways of approach, but invited us to come in this way. That true of all duty and of all service we render to God, the words had especial emphasis in the matter of our prayers.

He replied : " This involves the substitution of Christ's excellence and worthiness for our own. But, though I have always objected to that idea, I do not see but we, as sinners, are driven to it."

I said : " Would it not be better to say that we are drawn to it by what he has done for us ? One of your difficulties has been the getting near to God, the getting yourself heard by God, the finding of the way to God practically. Here is the open door. You have not to push it open. It is as wide open to you as it is to me. We do Christ a greater wrong than ever before if we, because of any pride or reluctance, do not enter. Thousands of men have come to God through Jesus Christ. They find audience ; they gain answer. One of them says, ' We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.' It is worth while for a man to try this way. More than this ; whatever may be true about God's acceptance, for Christ's sake, of the prayers of those who do not know that Christ is the only way, we who know of it cannot now seek at all with any hope of acceptance in any other way. For, with our knowledge of this as the required way, it would be a bitter wrong to Christ to try to come to God in any other. It would be also impossible that he should hear us."

I dwelt at some length on this fact of Christ as "the way," and I urged him to take Christ as his own way to God in prayer.

To my surprise he said: "I do not see why a man should want to take any other."

At my request he next read aloud the words of Jesus in the fourteenth of John's Gospel, at the thirteenth verse: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." I pointed out the fact in the verse, that Jesus stood so closely related to God that it was for God's glory or praise for him to respond to any request made by his Son; and the Son, in return, lets us use his name in our prayer to the Father. This is the great plea, without which all others are unavailing. It must be always understood, if not expressed in our petitions to God. I said: "You, Mr. B——, with your former experience, know very well the worth of a name in securing commercial consideration. The question of 'whose name is on his paper,' is a vital one in business. The question of whose name we plead in prayer is even more vital. Prayer is the presenting of a reason, the offering of a plea. It is not enough to plead our want; for all men are in want, but they do not therefore get forgiveness. Our goodness we cannot plead; for the plea would falter on our lips when we stood in the presence of God. We need a 'name above every name.' We need a Saviour whom, because of his redemption for us, God has 'exalted to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins.'"

He stopped me to ask if the words I had just used were not a quotation from the Bible, and if so that I would

turn to them. Finding for him the verse, he slowly read the words aloud, then turned back and read once more the verse about asking in Christ's name. He remarked: "This is a perfect theory of prayer. Do you remember that I said a little time since that prayer included everything, involved all religious truth? Well, it is certainly so. I ought to hold this thing steadily. But the unreasonable objections of years ago have a sort of automatic continuance. And yet I hope to get out some time into the clear light. I see a glimmer now. The light is in this direction. Prayer will be easier for this talk, and—pointing to his Bible—for these explanations of it."

But he recurred again and again to the idea of light as dawning on his mind. He seemed to think of a path over which he must go and find additional light as he went on in it.

On his table was a hymn book, evidently belonging to some member of the household. In it I found Dr. J. H. Newman's remarkable hymn, and begged leave to read it. The first words startled him and fixed his attention, as I read:

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,  
Lead thou me on;  
The night is dark, and I am far from home,  
Lead thou me on;  
Keep thou my feet. I do not ask to see  
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

"I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou  
Should'st lead me on;  
I loved to choose and see my path; but now,  
Lead thou me on;

I loved the garish day, and spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years.

“So long thy power hath blessed me, sure it still  
Will lead me on,  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night be gone;  
And with the morn those angel faces smile,  
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile.”

The effect of the hymn was almost overpowering upon Mr. B——. He sat like one entranced. He was not a man given to tears, but the tears were falling. I said: “Now let us both pray. You will follow me with your prayer.” He nodded his assent. My own prayer ended, he began his prayer for light, for God, for forgiveness. But it was interrupted by his emotion, and I took up his sentences and finished for him his prayer. As I rose to go he said: “I *do* hope God has heard our prayers to-day. Leave the book open at Newman's hymn on Light. It is just my case.”

It was my last visit. One week after, I called again. He was too ill to see me. His disease took a rapid turn for the worse, and in two days my friend had gone into that world of the “Kindly Light,” where shadows do not gather and where doubt shall be no more forever.



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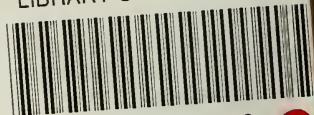
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